

GROUP TEST
SOUL CALIBUR II
Does the legend live on in Namco's swordfest?

FULL REVIEWS
CASTLEVANIA: ARIA OF SORROW [GBA]
SOCOM [PS2]
POSTAL 2 [PC]
MOTO GP 2 [XB/PC]
SILENT HILL 3 [PS2]
BURNOUT 2 [GC/XB]
DEF JAM VENDETTA [GC/PS2]
KIRBY: NIGHTMARE IN DREAM LAND [GBA]
P.N.03 [GC]

REVIEW
ENTER THE MATRIX
Infogrames proves there really is no spoon…

180 PAGES OF GAMING EXCELLENCE

R-TYPE FINAL
The last ever assault on the Bydo Empire starts here


eMag

Here at games™ we've become accustomed to stress. It's not that we expected anything other than heart-weakening hassle when we started doing the preliminary work on the magazine over a year ago, but very few of us really took into account the feasibility of putting it together. "Oooh, just imagine… 180 pages with a dedicated retro section every month; everyone's going to love it," we said. Somehow, we convinced ourselves that we could do it…

We'd like to think that in spite of the many challenges faced by the team we've somehow managed to put together a magazine that offers something suitably different to warrant your attention. Thankfully, that view is shared by you, the readers – you wouldn't buy it otherwise – and also the people who work in the videogames industry, hence the award you see below. So whether you buy the mag every month or support it by helping us to fill it, we'd really like to thank you all.

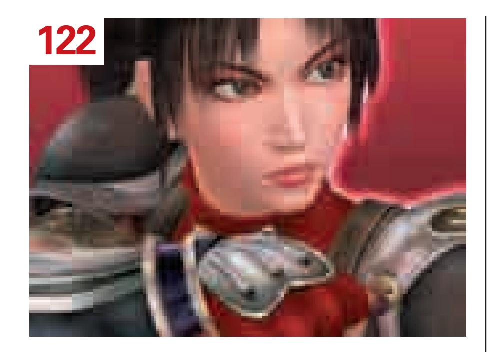
Simon Phillips, Group Editor




GAMES™
NO.6
Prop. S.LIPS

CONTENTS

Vanessa Z. Schneider leaps around like a woman possessed in *P.N.03*, but is it any good?







FEATURES

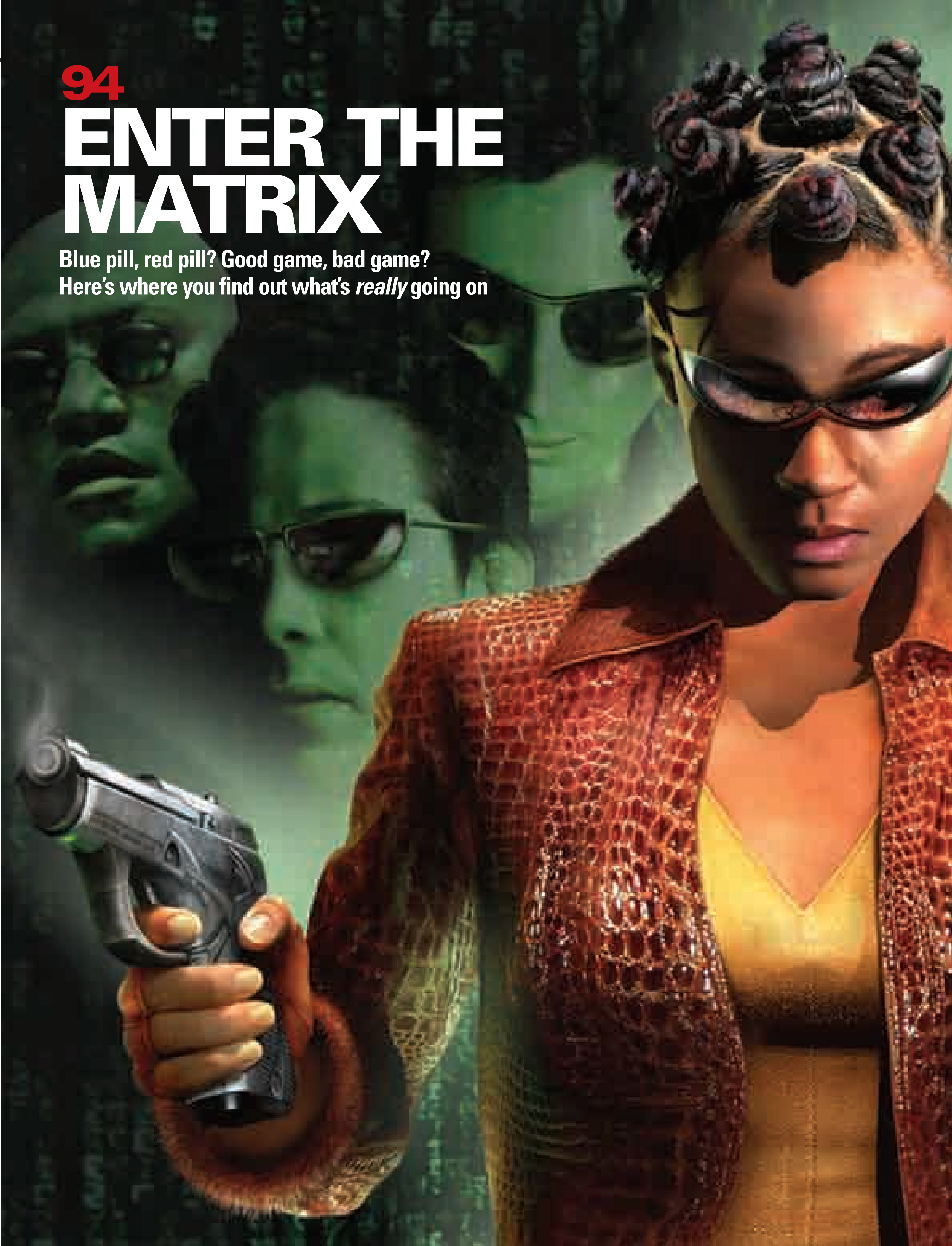
RETRO GAMING

If you're old enough to remember *Manimal*, or just love games irrespective of their vintage, this is where you should go…

PREVIEWS 52

REVIEWS 92

REGULARS



94

ENTER THE MATRIX

Blue pill, red pill? Good game, bad game? Here's where you find out what's *really* going on

NEWS

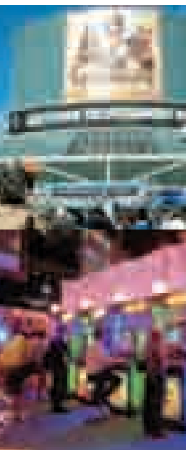
NEWS | INDUSTRY GOSSIP | OPINION

CONTENTS

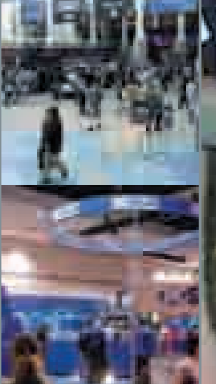
FIND OUT WHERE TO GET THE ESSENTIAL STORIES WITH OUR QUICK GUIDE TO THE NEWS



Every gamer's dream – all the shiny new games.



No, honestly, E3 is actually a lot of hard work. Really.



Another showcase for another next big thing…

TH THREE



MICROSOFT, NINTENDO AND SONY GET READY FOR YET ANOTHER ASSAULT

E BIG AT E3

The Electronic Entertainment Expo (E3) seems to arrive sooner every year. Anyone with even the most tenuous links to the games industry can be seen fighting past the crowds of eager journalists, all clamouring to get a scoop on the greatest future releases. This year though, all eyes will be firmly on the three key players – Microsoft, Nintendo and Sony.

Nintendo in particular needs to make this year's E3 extremely memorable. With the GameCube continuing to under-perform in all territories, the company needs to announce something truly special to convince gamers that the GameCube is still worth buying.

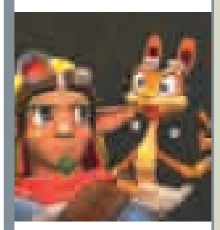
"Nintendo will be focusing on showcasing its software line-up for 2003 and beyond," said Shelly Friend, head of PR at Nintendo Europe "We will be showing our breadth of games for both GameCube and Game Boy Advance with a key focus on demonstrating the unique connectivity between GameCube and Game Boy Advance. And as always there will be a few surprises…"

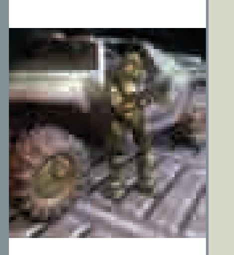
The 'Cube may be struggling but there's no denying that it has some of the most hotly anticipated titles. *Mario Kart: Double Dash*, *F-Zero GC* and *Starfox* are just a few of the hits we'll be battling through the crowds to see.

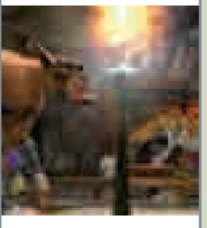
Microsoft will also be keen to steal as much of the limelight as possible with the strongly rumoured Xbox 1.5, *Halo 2*, *Sudeki* and *Fable* all hopefully available to play in some form. "This year's E3 will be an exciting time for games and Xbox Live," said Microsoft's European PR, Nick Grange. Microsoft's biggest trump card is, of course, Rare – the Twycross developer is expected to show off *Kameo: Elements Of Power*, *Sabre Man Stampede* and (fingers crossed) *Perfect Dark Zero*.

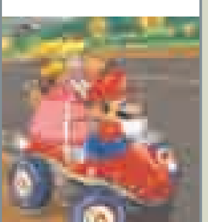
Sony's initial line-up seems very uninspired, with the majority of its titles being sequels. Of course, when a certain title happens to be *Gran Turismo 4*, it could be said that that's all Sony needs. "We're really looking forward to E3," said Jennie Kong, PR manager at SCEE. "We'll be unveiling exciting titles such as *GT4*, *Jak II: Renegade* and *Ghosthunter*."

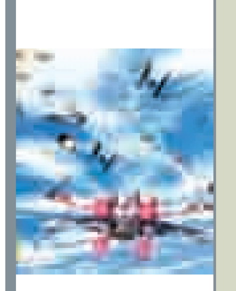
Regardless of which of the big three steals the show, it's a dead cert that punters won't go home disappointed.











INCOMING

Just a few of the titles to expect at this year's E3

PLAYSTATION2

JAK II: RENEGADE

Naughty Dog's sequel to its incredibly successful *Jak And Daxter* is coming along very nicely and, along with *Gran Turismo 4* (which is still strictly under wraps), will be one of Sony's main titles. Taking place two years after the original, the sequel sees Jak gaining many new powers after been experimented on. *Jak II: Renegade* will feature weapons, with the ability to play as Daxter and an altogether darker theme than the original as well. We can't wait.

RESIDENT EVIL ONLINE

If it's as good as it sounds, this is going to be pretty special. Team up with a group of friends to escape the dreaded Raccoon City, a town with more zombies than your average George A. Romero flick. While we're still not too sure how this latest twist on the long-running franchise will be received (as Sony's online plan hasn't proven itself yet), the thought of mashing zombies with much needed back-up is very intriguing.

XBOX

HALO 2

A sequel to Microsoft's most well-known Xbox title was always a foregone conclusion; nevertheless, we're still extremely excited about the ongoing adventures of Master Chief and can't wait to finally get to grips with the latest code. With Bungie being allowed to delay the hotly anticipated title until next year, we're hoping that the end results will surpass the original in every way.

KAMEO: ELEMENTS OF POWER

All eyes will be on Rare this year to make sure that its first Xbox title more than justifies the high price Microsoft paid for Nintendo's former star developer. With the original GameCube version last shown at E3 in 2001, we're very interested to see how far Rare's adventure title is progressing on Microsoft's hardware and whether it will harness the extra power of the Xbox.

GAMECUBE

MARIO KART: DOUBLE DASH

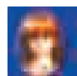
Mario's latest kart outing looks fantastic – eschewing the traditional 'go it alone style' of the originals, *Mario Kart: Double Dash* allows two characters on one kart (one driving, the other free to fight). Featuring all our favourite characters and a suspicious-looking *Mario Sunshine* engine, Nintendo's racer is bound to prove extremely popular with everyone who plays it.

ROGUE LEADER III: REBEL STRIKE

Rogue Leader II was a massive success on the GameCube (despite being rather shallow) and the sequel looks every bit as gorgeous. Factor 5 has totally rewritten the rulebook for *Star Wars* games and instead of the normal missions (like blowing up the Death Star or flying around the legs of AT-ATs), you'll now be able to hop on Speeder Bikes, race Land Speeders and even go for a jaunt in an AT-ST.

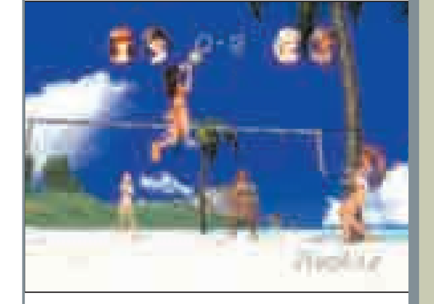
Data Stream

BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



GIRLS ON FILM

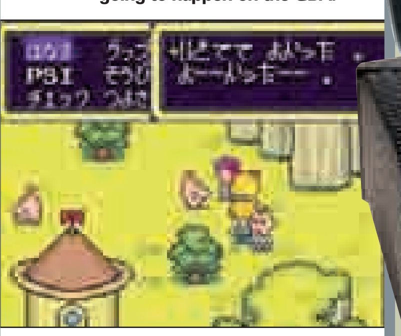
Tecmo is taking its *Dead Or Alive* franchise to the movies. No doubt inspired by the success of *Xtreme Beach Volleyball,* the plot is said to involve four of the girls venturing to an exotic island to participate in the latest *Dead Or Alive* world fighting tournament. No cast or director has been announced yet, although the script is reportedly being written by JF Lawton of *Pretty Woman* and *Under Siege* fame. It's hoped that the film will be released to coincide with *Dead Or Alive 4,* but if it's as bad as the recent *Resident Evil,* we don't mind waiting…

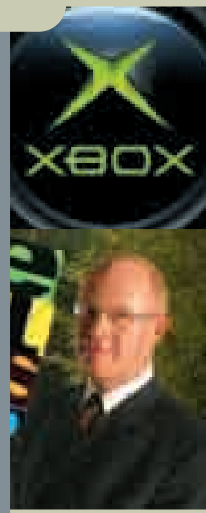




I WANT MY MUMMY

With the recent confirmation of Nintendo's RPG *Mother 1&2* for the GBA, it's been revealed that *Mother 3* has also gone into development. Shigesato Itoi, producer of the popular series, will oversee production once again. "When I had decided to convert *Mother 1&2* to the Game Boy Advance, I realised there would be pressure to revive development on *Mother 3* as well," he said. "Due to continued encouragement I can finally say that *Mother 3* is going to happen on the GBA."





ELSPA's Michael Rawlinson faces a constant battle to keep up with counterfeiters.



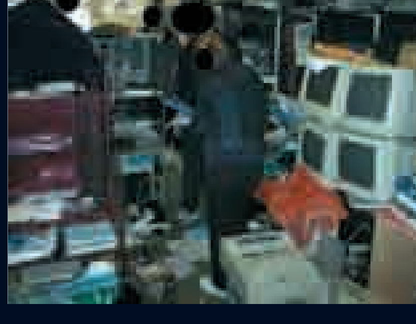
AMERICAN SOFTWARE PIRATE RECEIVES JAIL SENTENCE FOR SELLING ILLEGAL MOD CHIPS

GOODBYE,

Microsoft is the latest console manufacturer to crack down on piracy. David Rocci, owner of American website Isonews.com, has received a five-month prison sentence after pleading guilty to selling Enigmah mod chips for the Xbox. The Web site was taken over by the US Department of Justice in late February after it was discovered that Rocci had imported 450 Enigmah chips from the UK and sold them for around $28,000 (£18,000).

"David Rocci developed a public website that specifically catered to the underground piracy community," said a representative of the Department of Justice. "He attempted to profit by marketing circumvention devices to that community knowing they would be used to play pirated games." Rocci's full sentence consisted of five months in prison, a $28,500 fine, five months home detention and three years probation.

Of course, piracy has plagued the industry since the tape-swapping days of the Spectrum and C64. Nowadays, however, it's big business and presents a huge problem worldwide. According to ELSPA (the Entertainment and Leisure Software Publishers Association), over £2 million is lost every year in the UK to games software piracy – a staggering figure, but nothing compared to the $15 million lost in the US.







"MANY PEOPLE THINK PIRACY IS HARMLESS, BUT BY PURCHASING COUNTERFEIT GOODS YOU ARE, IN FACT, AN ACCOMPLICE TO A CRIMINAL ACT"
MICHAEL RAWLINSON, ELSPA

MR CHIPS

With piracy becoming such a large issue, the likes of ELSPA are now taking the war straight to the source. In the last five years the amount of software seized by ELSPA has risen ninefold – in 2002, 161,376 fakes worth almost half a million pounds were seized. "In our view, and that of the law, all forms of piracy are wrong," said Michael Rawlinson, ELSPA's anti-piracy unit director. "Although it is perceived as a victimless crime, piracy does impact on a wide range of people, from the original developer right through to the local community. Many people take the attitude that copying software is harmless but, if you look at it objectively, by purchasing counterfeit goods you are, in fact, an accomplice to a criminal act.

"Last year, we made over 500 successful raids around the UK," Rawlinson continued, "but there is still so much more to be done. Obviously it is impossible to police all forms of piracy, such as home copying. We have to concentrate our resources where they will be most effective and tackle the most damaging piracy operations. So, working closely with police and trading standards departments, we target the top three channels for counterfeit goods: overt selling at non-retail outlets such as car boots, markets and computer fairs; proper retailers selling illegal goods; and the Internet, whether it be supplying physical goods or peer-to-peer downloads."

The industry's biggest problem is that disc-copying software is now plentiful and much cheaper than it was five years ago. Owners of chipped Xboxes have an even easier time – it's actually possible to copy retail games straight onto a chipped console's hard drive. Microsoft has now wised up to this fact and all new Xbox software now comes with built-in disc security. "We're very committed to respect for other's intellectual property and we request the same respect applied to our innovations and those of our partners," said Nick Grange, Microsoft's European PR representative. "Piracy is theft, and Microsoft works with and supports industry organisations such as ELSPA on initiatives to combat these crimes."

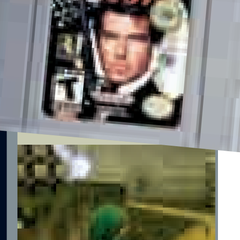
With the issue of piracy getting bigger, Rocci's sentence may prove to be a deterrent for anyone hoping to make a profit at the industry's expense.

NINTENDO: THE BANE OF ALL PIRATES

Nintendo perhaps more than any other software company has always taken a firm stand against piracy. According to hackers, the GameCube is incredibly tough to crack. "The GameCube's security is insane," moaned one disgruntled hacker who did not wish to be named. "And it's not just the security, the media it used for games is just as troublesome. I don't see anyone cracking it anytime soon, unless it's somehow through the Game Boy Advance adapter."

The media he's referring to is, of course, Nintendo's insistence on using its own 8cm DVDs (based on Matsushita's Optical Disc Technology). Of course, the downside to this is that the discs cannot store as much data as a regular DVD, with Infogrames' *Enter The Matrix* requires two discs to order to successfully run the game on the 'Cube.

Nintendo's cartridge systems were also very hard to hack – although its decision to keep the N64 cartridge-based, instead of using the more popular CD media of the time, ultimately became the console's undoing.



Bond proves invincible thanks to his N64 cartridge.



ONE XBOX AND NO CHIPS PLEASE

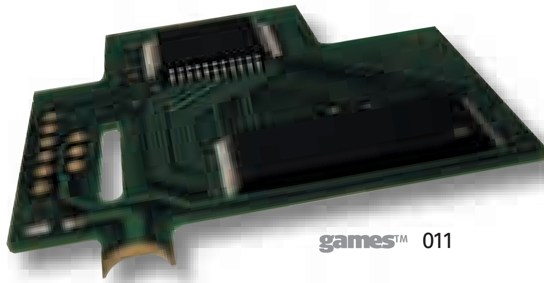
HACKERS MOD XBOX WITHOUT USING A MOD CHIP

In a move that's sure to enrage Microsoft, hackers can now mod the Xbox without the need for an actual chip. Techies have been trying to hack the console ever since Michael Robinson, CEO of Linux vendors Lindows, offered $100,000 to the first person who could run the Linux operating system on an unmodified machine.

A loophole was eventually found in the Electronic Arts game *James Bond: Agent Under Fire* save file that essentially gives the hacker a back door into the console, and the bug has since been found in other games. Within a few weeks, instructions for yet another new hack were appearing on various Web sites, this time with only a small amount of soldering needed to complete the illegal deed.

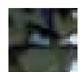
"Seeing things run on a platform they weren't intended to interests me," said pSyCo, a 17-year-old hacker from California. "The Xbox's security is very tight, but easily bypassed, meaning Microsoft was smart when implementing the high encryption signing method. However, the chain is only as strong as its weakest link. Poor hardware design (using standard x86 PC architecture) was a flaw in itself. It's not at all hard to find flaws and security problems, and poor software design, like the vulnerability found in *Agent Under Fire*, can ultimately break anything, thus leaving the system wide open."

We're very interested in seeing Microsoft's next course of action. The piracy issue is one that just won't go away and, on the Xbox at least, it seems to have got a lot easier…



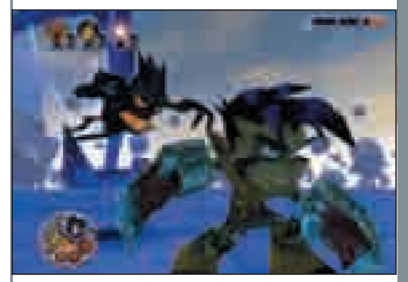


BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



ANY SPARE CHANGE, GUV?

Acclaim Entertainment's co-chairmen Gregory Fischbach and James Scoroposki have posted a $2 million deposit to secure the company's credit line in exchange for company shares. This desperate move is very similar to chief executive Trip Hawkin's personal loan to keep his own company, 3D, afloat and does not bode well for the ailing firm. Acclaim is now facing possible de-listing from the Nasdaq Exchange, due to its shares failing to maintain the $1 share price – they've dropped to a worryingly low 44 cents (a paltry 28p) each.





CONNED AGAIN

Thought you had the ultimate Game Boy Advance thanks to Nintendo's SP? Think again. A new battery pack is being launched that will apparently deliver 75 per cent more play time for the handheld. The new battery should be out in Japan as you read this and will retail for around ¥1,980 (just under £10). The battery's new capacity enables lucky owners to get a total of 17.5 hours of backlit play time. We're not sure why Nintendo couldn't have released this with the original machine, unless, of course, there's a GBA SP2 just around the corner…







Moto GP has already been patched, but did any of you notice…?

Will patching mean games are rushed out with bugs in them?

THE BIG FIX?

DESPITE PROMISES TO THE CONTRARY, XBOX LIVE RECEIVES ITS FIRST PATCHES

Now that Xbox Live is up and running, a downside is starting to become apparent, namely the auto update. Although Microsoft promised it would never happen, there have already been a large amount of bug fixes (aka patches) added to improve existing online games.

With over 350,000 users now enjoying Xbox Live worldwide Microsoft is understandably pleased with itself, but what of this worrying development and what are its implications? The update service is a regular occurrence and the likes of *Moto GP*, *Unreal Championship* and *Ghost Recon* have all been, or are in the process of being, updated.

"There is a big difference between the content download features of Xbox Live which can be used to provide new levels for a game, and the patching mechanism, which Live calls an auto update," said Shaun Hargreaves, lead programmer at Climax. "Content download can be used by publishers and developers in whatever ways they like, but auto updates are strictly controlled by Microsoft and can only be used if there is a very good reason for issuing one." This may be the case, but won't gamers simply be treated to poorly made and rushed products as developers struggle to meet deadlines?

"No, don't worry about people releasing buggy games secure in the knowledge that they can always patch them later," continues Hargreaves. "Microsoft is very much aware of that danger and won't allow it to happen."

Another downside for frustrated gamers without



MechAssault already offers downloadable extras, but what do non-Live gamers get?



Xbox Live or broadband is the inclusion of bonus downloads. "Our primary concern is to ensure all gamers have a great experience, whether they can take advantage of Xbox Live benefits or not," said Mark Craddock, Xbox Live strategy manager. "Games with downloadable content like *Splinter Cell* are designed to be great experiences on their own, and the addition of extra content is a bonus."

One other concern is the announcement of a keyboard for *Phantasy Star Online*. Why gamers would want to go back to a keyboard after using the superb communicator is a mystery. However, we feel that it will allow many developers to easily port PC online titles to Microsoft's console and thus compete on a new platform – although we may not see this development in the UK. "We have not announced anything in Europe regarding a keyboard or a mouse for Xbox," Craddock said.

Microsoft's Xbox has always been labelled as a 'PC in a box' due to its built-in hard drive, broadband support and DVD player, and these latest developments are sure to add further fuel to this particular fire.

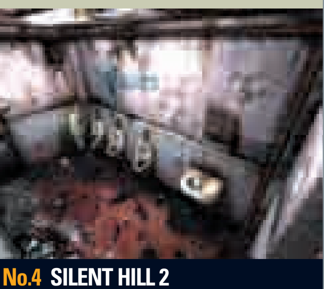
games™ THE TOP FIVE

GAMING TOILETS



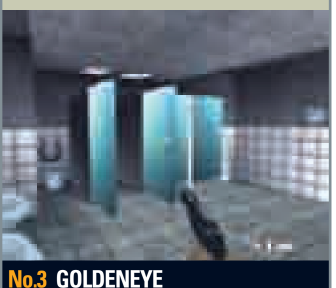
No.5 DUKE NUKEM 3D

Only a real man drinks from the toilet…



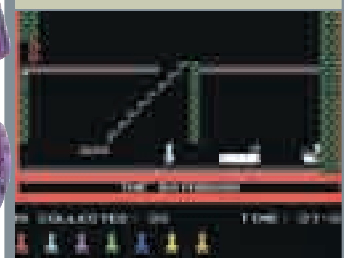
No.4 SILENT HILL 2

Possibly the most disgusting toilets ever. EVER



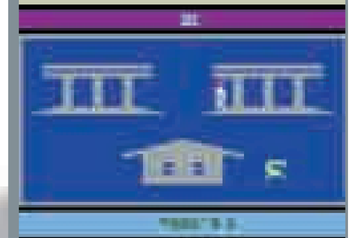
No.3 GOLDENEYE

Talk about being caught out



No.2 JET SET WILLY

Beware the toilet of doom, Willy!



No.1 E.T. THE EXTRA TERRESTRIAL

He looks just like a toilet – and so did the game



LET'S PATCH THINGS UP

OPINION ON THE XBOX PATCH IS SPLIT DOWN THE MIDDLE

So what's the consensus on Xbox patching, then? "We have the technical ability to provide an update to a game, and this is important for both the developers and publishers as well as the gamers," says Mark Craddock, Xbox Live strategy manager. "The reason is that if members of the gaming community find ways to circumvent competitive elements, then for the sake of the whole community the ability to correct this can be discussed with the publisher and developer and potentially fixed. In any case, the Xbox certification process is designed to deliver extremely high quality for all games, making a situation whereby games are routinely patched after release unnecessary."

Shaun Hargreaves, lead programmer at Climax has a similar view: "I think auto update is a brilliant thing and I'm very glad that Live allows it. Obviously it would be nice if games were perfect at release, but mistakes do sometimes slip through.

"If a game does turn out to have flaws, it is a very good thing that the developers have the ability to correct them. If developers do it right, most gamers won't even notice that the game has been patched. For instance, we issued an auto update for *Moto GP* right at the launch of the Live service to fix some problems that came to light during the Live beta. If you weren't on the beta, you've never actually played an un-patched version of *Moto GP* on Live."

But not everyone is so enthusiastic about patching – particularly the gamers . "Patches will improve some games but more games will need patching because publishers will let more and more bugs slip through," writes **games™** forum member DaddyCool. "This means people who aren't interested in Live will be treated as if they don't matter – a big mistake in my opinion because Microsoft has over-estimated the serious interest in online gaming. They need to give non-Live gamers some of the extra content."

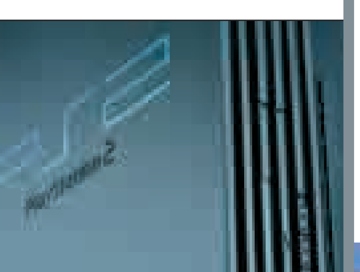
Data stream

BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



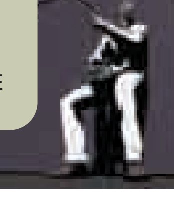
WE DO CARE

After numerous complaints, Sony has finally withdrawn the registration of the phrase 'shock and awe'. The application was originally made shortly after a US-led attack on Iraq that involved a heavy aerial bombardment was termed 'shock and awe'. It was rumoured that Sony was planning to launch a new online game, but after various sections of the media accused them of cashing in on a tragedy, a sheepish Sony has now done a complete turnaround. "We have withdrawn the application which was made on 21 March," a spokeswoman stated.

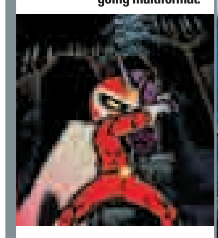


SNAKES ALIVE

Well, the worst-kept secret in E3 history has finally been confirmed – Konami is set to bring the *Metal Gear Solid* series to the GameCube. But those of you hoping for a new title should be ready for disappointment – rather than a sequel or standalone game, Silicon Knights (of *Eternal Darkness* fame) is remaking the original PSone version with the graphics engine from the sequel, under the watchful eye of Hideo Kojima and Shigeru Miyamoto. Still, at least the original was a good game so 'Cube owners shouldn't be too upset.



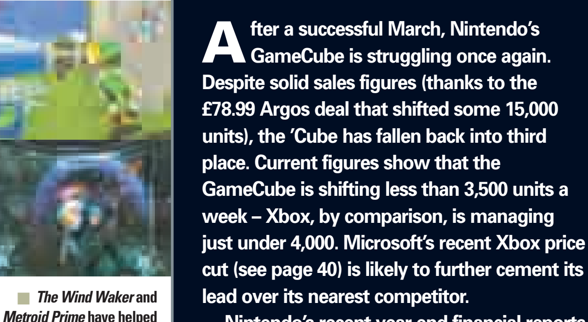
Capcom's 'exclusive' GameCube titles are now going multiformat.





GAMECUBE ON THE ROPES?

DESPITE A BRIEF SURGE IN SALES, THE GAMECUBE CONTINUES TO SUFFER



The Wind Waker and *Metroid Prime* have helped support the 'Cube but the machine is still struggling.

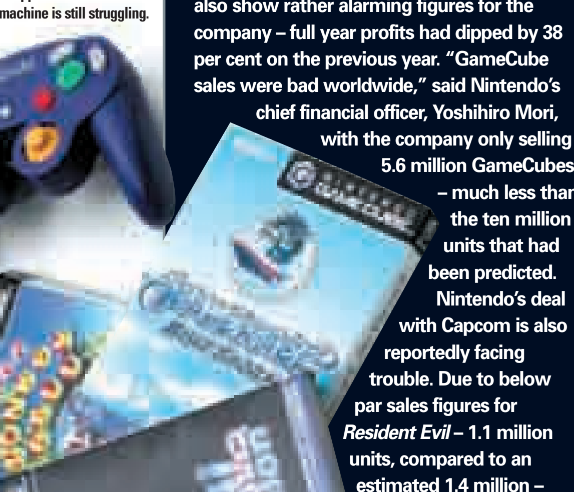
After a successful March, Nintendo's GameCube is struggling once again. Despite solid sales figures (thanks to the £78.99 Argos deal that shifted some 15,000 units), the 'Cube has fallen back into third place. Current figures show that the GameCube is shifting less than 3,500 units a week – Xbox, by comparison, is managing just under 4,000. Microsoft's recent Xbox price cut (see page 40) is likely to further cement its lead over its nearest competitor.

Nintendo's recent year-end financial reports also show rather alarming figures for the company – full year profits had dipped by 38 per cent on the previous year. "GameCube sales were bad worldwide," said Nintendo's chief financial officer, Yoshihiro Mori, with the company only selling 5.6 million GameCubes – much less than the ten million units that had been predicted.

Nintendo's deal with Capcom is also reportedly facing trouble. Due to below par sales figures for *Resident Evil* – 1.1 million units, compared to an estimated 1.4 million – Capcom is now said to be moving away from GameCube-exclusive software. While neither company has confirmed these rumours we can't help remember the 'exclusivity' of *P.N.03, Killer 7, Dead Phoenix* and *Viewtiful Joe,* which are all now multiformat titles.

So what is Nintendo doing to help the GameCube? One of the biggest moves is its recent alteration of its licensing policy. Third-party royalty rates have been dropped in order to generate more software for the machine. "The biggest games last year were games like *GTA: Vice City* and they came from an independent publisher," George Harrison, Nintendo of America's VP of marketing, told news agency Reuters. "Before, our royalty rate was a little more aggressive, so to the third-party publisher it was a little less attractive to make games for the GameCube. We need to make sure that we have good relationships with all the independent publishers, because you never know where the next big hit is going to come from."

The new royalty rate will make Nintendo a lot more competitive, but we're not sure if companies that have already abandoned Nintendo would consider making games for a machine with such a small user base. Even if Nintendo do manage to lure back the likes of CodeMasters and THQ, it could be at least a year (thanks to development time) before it sees any benefit from the change.



PS2 AND A HALF?

THE PLAYSTATION2 GETS A MAKEOVER. TRINNY AND SUSANNA NOT INVOLVED

Sony's PlayStation2 has received its first hardware overhaul since its release over two years ago. The new version (known as SCPH-15000) should be out in Japan as you read this and improves the performance of the PS2's DVD player. The console will now support DVD-R, DVD+R, DVD-RW and DVD+RW rewritable and recordable formats, but not DVD-RAM.

"The current player can read some of those discs but it isn't stable," said Yoshiko Furusawa, a Sony spokeswoman. "We never officially supported them." Progressive-scan will also be available, giving a much better picture on compatible televisions.

Other additions include a built-in receiver for remote control compatibility and a significant reduction in fan noise. A new remote control is also being designed and will feature both on/off and disc open/close options, and, being a remote control, won't need to use a controller port. The only gaming downgrade is the lack of the iLink connector.

So when's the new look available over here? "The latest version of the PlayStation2 is being introduced first in Japan," stated Jennie Kong of SCEE. "At this stage, no European model is available, and plans for its availability in Europe are not yet set."



NEW LIFE FOR HALF-LIFE

Activision now has exclusive worldwide publishing rights to all future work created by PC developers Valve. *Day Of Defeat*, a multiplayer online game, will be powered by Valve's *Half-Life* technology and is the first game to benefit from the new partnership.

"Valve has a proven track record of creating ground-breaking games with worldwide appeal," said Larry Goldberg, executive vice president of Activision Worldwide Studios. "We are looking forward to a strong and successful partnership."

The new deal shows just how much Activision are willing to break into the PC market. "It's an honour to enter this new partnership," said Gabe Newell, co-founder and managing director of Valve. "Activision has never been more influential than it is today."

Although Activision must be justifiably pleased with its purchase, we wonder if Valve will continue its slow process of development – they've been working on *Half-Life 2* for five years. It will also be interesting to see how Valve's relationships with Vivendi and Sierra will fare.




GAMES ROOM 101

THINGS WE HATE ABOUT VIDEOGAMES

NO.6: ADVERTISING SELLS, BABY

Not Actual Game Footage' – the phrase du jour for advertising agencies intent on peddling their games to the gullible masses. Whether it's stylised adverts showing anything but images of gameplay, or computer-rendered scenes that look like the game but aren't, adverts for games hardly ever show the product they're advertising – unlike virtually every other ad on TV.

But before you go on about how you'd never be fished in by an ad for a game, we're not talking about you; after all, they're made to capture the attention of casual gamers and youngsters who know little about games other than that they like sport, violence, pretty graphics and anything that looks 'cool'.

And that's the whole point of advertising – to make things look cool. Of course, with other products, this usually entails showing someone using, eating or otherwise displaying a product in an interesting and no doubt sexy way. Not so though with videogames – showing footage would link the product with gaming, which we all know is 'uncool'. No, better to show some random images and a quick flash of the box at the end. Yes, it works – but it's not right. If we tried not showing screenshots, we'd be out of a job quicker than you can say 'actual content may differ'.



Rayman – one of the guilty parties when it comes to not showing 'actual game footage'.

A lengthy advert full of girls turning ugly, and yet no game footage anywhere. Damn you, Sony.

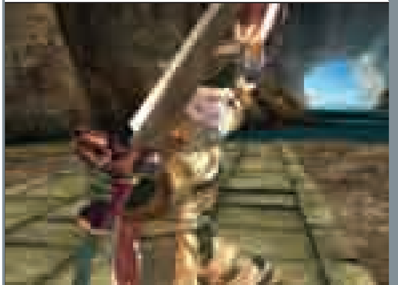
Data stream

BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



SLOW CALIBUR?

Despite plenty of hype, *Soul Calibur II* has under-performed in the Japanese multiformat chart. The title has only managed combined sales of just over 140,000 units (the Dreamcast original smashed this with over 300,000 units in its first week). PlayStation2 was the most popular format entering at fifth place, GameCube managed seventh while the Xbox version scraped into the top twenty. A week later and the PS2 and GameCube versions crashed out of the top ten – proof that the Soul may not be burning as brightly as Namco would like.





LET THE GAMES BEGIN

Square-Enix has finally opened applications for beta testing on PC and PS2 versions of *Final Fantasy XI* in America. There was much speculation that the game would not appear outside Japan because of the hard drive that was needed for the PS2, but apparently the American version will not use it. We don't know whether the new version will have less features thanks to the lack of the once-vital hardware, but this news should mean that a European release may soon be announced.



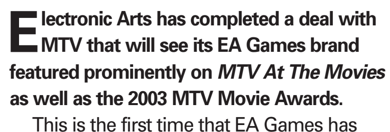
ELECTRONIC ARTS SECURES SIX-MONTH SPONSORSHIP DEAL WITH MTV



AND THE AWARD GOES TO…



Who better to sponsor a movie show than the licence-heavy EA?



Electronic Arts has completed a deal with MTV that will see its EA Games brand featured prominently on *MTV At The Movies* as well as the 2003 MTV Movie Awards.

This is the first time that EA Games has had a European sponsorship deal and the end result seems to be causing much excitement in the EA camp. "The MTV brand is the *Halo* of cool," said Al King, EA Europe's director of consumer marketing. "The MTV Europe deal will help ensure that the EA Games brand will reach a pan-European youth audience in a relevant, credible and impactful way, legitimising games as part of youth lifestyle and reinforcing EA Games as the home of the definitive movie to game conversion."



The deal consists of EA Games having billboards and promo shots around the *MTV At The Movies* show, as well as being promoted at the MTV party at the Cannes Film Festival later this year. While MTV are no strangers to game sponsorship (its recent MTV Sports event was sponsored by Nintendo's GameCube), this is the first time that it has ever entered such a long-term deal.

With the likes of *Indiana Jones And The Emperor's Tomb* and *Jurassic Park: Operation Genesis* currently in the top 20 and EA Games' own *Lord Of The Rings: The Two Towers* and *Harry Potter And The Chamber Of Secrets* still in the top 40 since Christmas, we're confident that the move will prove highly successful for both parties.



Digital Bond knew he was cooler by far…



BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



HOW MANY CARS?

No wonder it's taking so long. Polyphony Digital's highly anticipated *Gran Turismo 4* is said to feature over 2,000 vehicles and around a hundred racecourses. The final game will be fully compatible with the new PS2 network adaptor and will use an online battle mode, which enables up to eight players to play at once. In a move similar to the recently announced online version of *SEGA GT*, gamers will also be able to exchange vehicles online, providing they don't get cut off first by the other player.



We've teamed up with those fine people at GAME to offer you a £5 discount voucher, thus ensuring your hard-earned cash will stretch just that little bit further. With plenty of quality games around at the moment, you've no excuse not to use it...





Tiwak's stylised cave boy now has to find a new home.

TIWAK SPEAK OUT ABOUT MICROSOFT'S DECISION TO NOT PUBLISH TORK

ALL TORK AND NO TROUSERS

Following Microsoft's decision to cancel publication of its smart-looking prehistoric platformer *Tork*, it's no surprise that its creator, French softco Tiwak, is a bit vocal about the subject. "I know the decision was a difficult one for Microsoft Game Studios and was based on balancing its future games portfolio," said Yann Le Tensorer, CEO of Tiwak. "Of course, the whole team at Tiwak was surprised and sad when Microsoft told us they wouldn't publish *Tork* any more – we've been working on this game for two years now and this little cave boy has become like our own child. I'm confident that we will quickly find a new publisher, so things should be okay."

According to Tensorer, Tiwak has received an incredible amount of help from its former publishers. "Microsoft has been very supportive so far," he says. "They've sent us contacts, sometimes talked to interested publishers to explain their decision and even made a 'pitch kit' then sent it out when requested. Most importantly though, they made it possible for Tiwak to buy the rights to *Tork* back at a competitive price."

While cancellations like this are commonplace within the industry, it's quite possible that Rare's upcoming *Kameo: Elements Of Power* could feature heavily in Microsoft's sudden decision to ditch Tiwak's cave boy. The two games share very similar elements and it is highly likely that Microsoft would not want one of its own titles competing with the first release from arguably its biggest first-party developer.

"It would make sense if they wanted to avoid having too many directly competing products in their portfolio," agreed Tensorer. "The funny thing would be *Tork* selling more than *Kameo*, but only the future will tell."

Hopefully, Tiwak's *Tork* will find itself a new home in the near future, with an announcement possibly due at E3. After all, if there's one genre that's poorly represented on the Xbox, it's the platformer.



BEHIND EVERY SUCCESSFUL PRINCE OF DARKNESS, THERE'S A TALENTED DIRECTOR – ESPECIALLY IN THE CASE OF THE CASTLEVANIA SERIES. WE GO BEHIND THE CAPE WITH THE MAN RESPONSIBLE FOR SOME OF THE GREATEST VAMPIRE-HUNTING ADVENTURES EVER CREATED…



"WE THOUGHT ABOUT REMAKING SYMPHONY OF THE NIGHT, BUT A REMAKE DOESN'T NECESSARILY MEAN THAT NEWCOMERS WILL BUY IT JUST BECAUSE IT WAS POPULAR ONCE BEFORE, DOES IT?"

KOJI IGARASHI, DIRECTOR, KCEJ

KOJI IGARASHI

KONAMI JAPAN (KCEJ)

Stop for a second and think about *Castlevania* – what images immediately spring to mind? Ancient resurrected vampires with sharpened fangs, perhaps? Muscle-bound heroes with whips swinging from Mode 7-rendered chandeliers? Or maybe a horde of undead monsters, all waiting to taste your steel and drop a useful item or two? All perfectly valid answers, so why can't we get the image of young schoolgirls sitting under trees and declaring their love to their boyfriends out of our heads?

"Before the *Castlevania* series," says Koji Igarashi, the man responsible for every instalment of *Castlevania* since *Symphony Of The Night* on the PSone, "I worked on the programming and scenario writing for *Toki Meki Memorial* [part of a dating simulation series that's very popular in Japan]. In fact, it was because of this that I was able to join the *Castlevania* team, thanks to my previous experience with scenario writing. Apart from that though, I don't think *Toki Meki Memorial* influenced my work on *Castlevania*." And thank god for that – if it had, we'd probably all be playing a very different kind of vampire-hunting game.

For a man with such a varied career history (especially one who worked part-time at Konami while repeating a year of school in his youth, no less), Igarashi-san has come a long way. From his early days on educational products and PC games, to bringing *Twin Bee* to the PC Engine and beyond, he now finds himself in a position that most developers might envy – being in direct control of one of the biggest franchises under Konami's vast belt. With privilege comes responsibility though, and considering *Castlevania*'s cult following, there's obviously a lot of pressure on the team to come up with something that's worthy of the rest of the series.

"Naturally, I feel the pressure all the time," says Igarashi-san, "but I don't like to focus on just pleasing the hard-core or cult fans, mainly because if we tried to make a game that appealed to the hard-core users, we'd be in a situation where the game would be more difficult to play for beginners. Consequently, we'd end up with a game that's only appreciated by a small group of people. As a creator, I would rather change the situation and create a title that pleases more people than just the fans.

"If we continue taking *Castlevania* in the direction it is going, we'll soon realise the limitations of the genre. That's why by experimenting with new ideas and pushing *Castlevania* in another direction, we can create better games. Essentially, my role is to decide that direction while keeping the atmosphere of the series at the same time."

Of course, regardless of how much Igarashi-san would like to get away from the old routine in the *Castlevania* games of the future, he should be careful not to accidentally dig up the past. Having been subjected to the deathly-average N64 titles that tried to turn a 2D platformer into a 3D adventure, we know how even the slightest slip during the development process can lead to mediocrity.

"The new *Castlevania* title that we are currently working on is a fully 3D game," Igarashi-san reveals. "We thought about making a 2.5D title [as with Konami's recent revival of the *Contra* series] but decided that the camera was too difficult to deal with. It would also be hard to create a true 2D title on a home console and make it a success, considering the effectiveness of 2D games in the current market. Obviously though, we've had a 3D *Castlevania* title in the past but it won't be like that – we're looking to approach it from a totally different direction.

"The big problem is that although the graphical expression of the game can be increased through the use of 3D, it places limitations on the gameplay. When we approach a project like this, it's important that we make the right decisions. For instance, we're being very particular about certain game elements in the new PS2 game despite the fact that visually some of them aren't suited to a 3D situation. Ultimately, we're expecting high performance in the playability stakes and, hopefully, everyone will be satisfied with what we do." We hope so too, especially since it's the perfect balance of gameplay, story and atmosphere that has always made *Castlevania* games so compelling in the past.

We don't doubt the abilities of Igarashi-san and his team, but the last thing we want is to be bitterly disappointed by the very thing that's making us salivate at the very thought of it…

Castlevania: Aria Of Sorrow is out now on GBA and reviewed on page 102. *Castlevania* (working title) for the PS2 is previewed on page 68.



The **Big** Picture

WHILE SOME MAY BELIEVE THAT SIZE DOESN'T MATTER, IF YOU'RE AN AVID GAMES PLAYER THIS SIMPLY ISN'T THE CASE. GAMERS WANT HUGE SCREENS ON WHICH TO ENJOY THE LATEST BLOCKBUSTER GAMES AND YOU WON'T FIND ANYTHING BIGGER THAN THE IMAGE PRODUCED BY A PROJECTOR…

Go back just two years and the possibility of owning a swanky projector to enjoy films or – even better – play games on was little more than a pipe dream unless you had a large Swiss bank account. Now though, a fairly decent projector can set you back as little as £1,500. Granted, it's still not the same as spending a couple of hundred pounds on the latest console, but prices (especially for LCD projectors) are steadily dropping.

Of course, it's not just a simple case of nipping down your local retailer, picking up the latest model and going home to set it up – a little more thought is required before you can 'go large'. Ideally, your best bet is to go to a specialist installer like StoneAudio UK (see details below), who will tell you exactly what you can and can't do.

Distance is one of the main factors you'll need to take into consideration – sitting up close to a massive screen may give you the sensation of 'being there' but you'll lose most of the screen outside your peripheral vision. Space is also a crucial factor – you shouldn't even think of setting up one of these behemoths in a poky spare room or tiny bedroom.

Another important thing to consider is that although it might sound like a good idea, projectors aren't designed specifically to play games no matter how good some of them may look, so if you're expecting gorgeously sharp visuals to complement your new expanded image, you can forget it.

RGB input is practically unheard of on projectors so your normal options are normally composite or SVHS. Ideally, you'll really need to use a good quality DVD player to get the optimum performances out of these machines.

That said, if you're considering a visual upgrade but are still unsure about spending a small fortune to enjoy your gaming passion, we're here to help. Over the next few pages we'll take a look at some of the more suitably priced projectors that are currently available and give you our verdict so that you only get the best.

All equipment kindly supplied by StoneAudio UK Ltd, Bournemouth. Why not get in touch with them? Call 01202 201735 or visit www.stoneaudio.co.uk

SONY VPL-HS2

Price:	£1,395 (with free 70-inch screen)
Dimensions:	(WxHxD) 304 x 168 x 321mm
Connections:	Composite, S-Video
Noise	30DB
Brightness:	850 Lumes
Website:	www.stoneaudio.co.uk



Sony's VPL-HS2 is the perfect model for anyone new to the world of home cinema projectors. Designed as a coffee table model (meaning it sits on top of something), Sony's LCD projector is a very contemporary piece of hardware and its sleek silver finish wouldn't look out of place in any lounge.

Once the projector has fired up, the first thing that strikes you is the impressively quiet fan. Projectors can be notorious for the amount of noise they throw out and to hear (or rather, not hear) the HS2 in action is a joy. Of course when you're in the middle of a frantic four-player game of *Halo*, fan noise is negligible, but once you play a DVD and get to a dialogue-heavy section you'll definitely appreciate it.

IT'S OH SO QUIET

Like all the projectors on test, the HS2 definitely benefits from having a proper screen bundled with it. If you were hoping to watch these projectors on a white wall prepare to be very disappointed. Modern projectors give off such bright images that even the smallest imperfections will become all too visible to the discerning eye.

While it may be the cheapest model here, its picture quality is still very good (apart from some very slight pixellation at times). It doesn't manage the overall vibrancy of the other projectors (dark sections of games like *Halo* are particularly hard to make out) but the detail is still sharp. The only major disappointment is the worrying lack of RGB input, which is bound to upset a few gamers out there, but this is really a small price to pay when you consider what you're getting for your money.

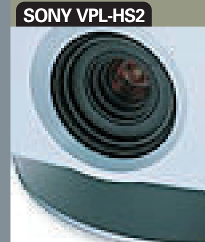
It may be the bulkiest player tested but its ease of use, stylish look, superb price and the fact that it comes with a free screen ensures that this is cheap and cheerful in a good way.

VERDICT 9/10
GREAT FIRST PROJECTOR WITH AN EXCELLENT FREE SCREEN

SANYO PLV-Z1

"A GOOD PICTURE AND A SURPRISING ARRAY OF EXTRAS FOR SUCH A LOW-PRICED MACHINE"

SONY VPL-HS2



"THIS IS THE PERFECT MODEL FOR ANYONE NEW TO THE WORLD OF HOME CINEMA PROJECTORS"

SANYO PLV-Z1

Price:	£1,495
Dimensions:	(WxHxD) 333 x 108.5 x 246.5 mm
Connections:	Composite, Component
Noise	30DB
Brightness:	700 Lumes
Website:	www.stoneaudio.co.uk



Our second LCD model is Sanyo's PLV-Z1. At first we thought a centre speaker had been sent to us by mistake – closer inspection, though, reveals a flip-down fascia that hides a well-ventilated and clutter-free front. Coming in either silver or blue finishes, Sanyo's machine is slightly more compact than the Sony and just as easy on the eye.

A rather handy feature on this model is the dashboard-like effect on the back of the projector. From here you can easily navigate through the machine's many user-friendly menus (perfect when the remote refuses to be found). It's also possible to rest the Z1 on a table or mount it on a ceiling. Its sleek size will ensure that once it's in place it will remain completely unobtrusive.

EXTRAS! EXTRAS!

A small fault does become apparent when the machine is first switched on – the throw distance (see glossary) is not as far as the other models, essentially meaning that this will need to be set up that little bit closer to the projector screen.

You should be pleased with the image that the Z1 can produce – flesh tones are surprisingly good for such a low-priced machine and even black levels (the most difficult colour to create, due to the amount of light projected) are of a decent standard. Ghosting was sometimes a problem, although this was also seen on Sony's VPL-HS2. The biggest surprise is the inclusion of component output, which is practically unheard of in this price range. Fan noise, while not comparable to the HS2, is still relatively good and will not cause any unnecessary distractions.

Sanyo's PLV-Z1 may be more expensive than Sony's machine but it offers an improved picture and a good array of extras such as Lens Shift and component outputs. Well worth looking out for.

VERDICT 8/10
A SOLID PROJECTOR AT A VERY GOOD PRICE

DREAMVISION CINEXONE

Price:	£3,200
Dimensions:	(WxHxD) 220 x 50.8 x 170
Connections:	Composite, RGB, S-Video
Noise	35DB
Brightness:	1100 Lumes
Web-site:	www.stoneaudio.co.uk

Don't be scared off by the sudden jump in price, Dreamvision's Cinexone is worth every penny. For starters, it looks wonderful and is reassuringly solid, with its compact size echoed in its credit card-like remote.

White casing is more normally associated with kitchen appliances than home entertainment hardware, but five minutes with the Cinexone machine is enough to make you think otherwise. The ceiling-mounted projector uses DLP (Digital Light Processing) and benefits greatly from this new technology.

Firing up the projector immediately shows where that extra £1,500 has been spent. Flesh tones, black levels and brightness are all of exceptional quality with even basic composite showing off as high a quality image as the tired connection can manage. It's when you play the likes of *Panzer Dragoon* or *Burnout 2* that you really start to appreciate the sheer quality that Dreamvision's projector can pump out. *Panzer* in particular is a delight, with the gorgeously vibrant landscapes looking simply superb when shown on a 7-foot screen.

LOOKING GOOD

As lovely as the Cinexone may be, it's not without its faults. Fan noise is a lot louder than the other models we tested and it's also not as user-friendly as the lower-priced projectors. The lack of a decent dust protector for the lens is also worrying, although, in fairness, the Sony and Optoma machines suffer from the same problem.

Even with these faults taken into account, the Cinexone still represents very good value for money and if you can afford to spend that little bit extra to enjoy films and games, you won't be disappointed.



VERDICT 7/10
GREAT DESIGN AND PICTURE QUALITY, THOUGH RATHER LOUD

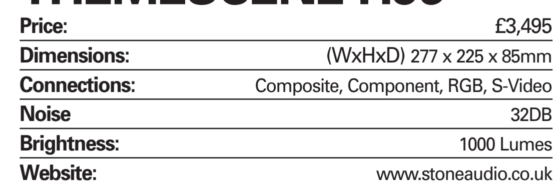
THEMESCENE H56

"THE H56 AVOIDED THE GHOSTING THAT WAS EVIDENT ON THE CHEAPER MODELS"

CINEXONE

"THE PRICE IS JUSTIFIED – BRIGHTNESS, FLESH TONES, AND BLACK LEVELS ARE ALL OF A VERY HIGH QUALITY"

OPTOMA THEMESCENE H56



Price:	£3,495
Dimensions:	(WxHxD) 277 x 225 x 85mm
Connections:	Composite, Component, RGB, S-Video
Noise	32DB
Brightness:	1000 Lumes
Website:	www.stoneaudio.co.uk



Finally we have Optoma's machine, and although it may come with the highest price tag that doesn't mean it's the best…

It's certainly much brighter than the previous models and also shows none of the ghosting that was sometimes apparent on the lower-priced projectors. Even a fair amount of ambient light wasn't enough to detract from the picture quality. Colours are reproduced perfectly, with even black areas looking very solid indeed.

EASY AS RGB

One handy benefit of both the Themescene and the Cinexone is the ability to handle RGB output via a modified lead (especially as S-Video resulted in a worrying mesh effect when used). Seeing as how RGB is the Holy Grail of gamers, the lack of this ability on the Sanyo and Sony may put some prospective buyers off.

Like the Sanyo PLV-Z1, the Themescene can be used in coffee table and ceiling modes. It features all the elements you'd expect to find on a player of this price such as keystone correction and colour temperature, and is generally a very good package. Fan noise was noticeably quieter than the Cinexone (although not on a par with the Sony model) and it had a decent throw distance.

Although streets ahead of both the lower-priced Sony and Sanyo projectors, it doesn't really hold enough appeal over the Cinexone to justify an extra £250. It's definitely a very desirable projector, but the compact size and easy-to-understand menus of the Cinexone just pip it to the post.

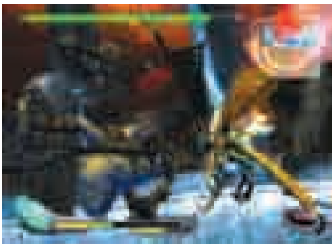
VERDICT 7/10
EXCELLENT, BUT NOT ENOUGH FOR GAMERS FOR THIS PRICE

WHAT CAN A PROJECTOR DO FOR YOUR FAVOURITE GENRE?

SHOOT-'EM-UPS

Games like *Panzer Dragoon* look simply incredible when shown on these huge screens. The sheer scale of a projector imbues you with the sense of 'being there' that a normal television (no matter how big) simply can't achieve. Old-school shooters like *R-Type* and *Space Harrier* also benefit greatly, due to the fact that it's a lot easier to see what's actually firing at you, which is also very handy if you play bullet-fests like *Mars Matrix* and *Battle Garegga*.

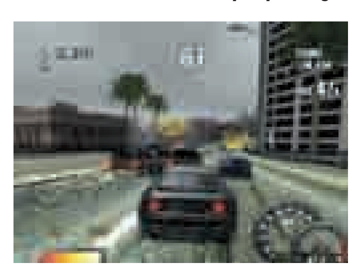


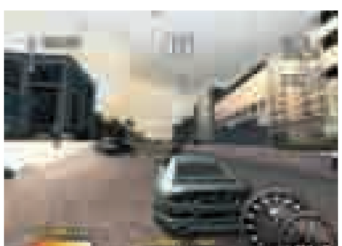


"GAMES LIKE PANZER DRAGOON LOOK SIMPLY INCREDIBLE WHEN SHOWN ON THESE HUGE SCREENS"

RACERS

Like the aforementioned shoot-em-ups, narrowly avoiding pile-ups in *Burnout 2* or speeding round corners at breakneck speeds in *Moto GP 2* on a huge screen is a rather humbling experience. Select an in-car camera, crank up the sound to deafening levels and prepare to lose all your cares as you're thrust into an amazing driving experience. Playing the likes of *Burnout 2* on one of these beasts is truly memorable and is well worth the money (if you've got that sort of cash lying around, of course).

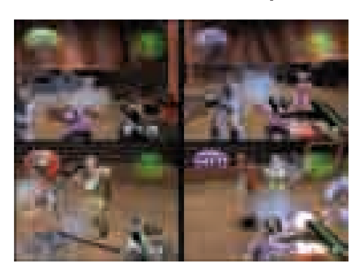


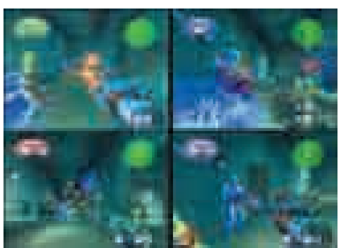


"SPEEDING ROUND CORNERS AT BREAKNECK SPEEDS IN MOTO GP 2 ON A HUGE SCREEN IS A RATHER HUMBLING EXPERIENCE, BUT NOT TO BE MISSED"

MULTIPLAYER GAMES

Okay, it's not strictly a genre but the benefits of using a projector for this type of game are obvious. Squinting into your own quarter of the TV screen will never become an issue again – and after a quick four-player deathmatch on *Timesplitters 2* or *Halo*, you'll wonder how you ever got on without one. Multiplayer games are by far the most fun you can have on a projector, although a word of warning: as certain games cut down on a lot of textures to run more smoothly, don't be surprised if your favourite game doesn't look quite as good as it usually does. Now where's that *Mario Kart: Double Dash* when you need it…?





"SQUINTING INTO YOUR OWN QUARTER OF THE TV SCREEN WILL NEVER BECOME AN ISSUE AGAIN, AND AFTER A FOUR-PLAYER SESSION ON HALO, YOU'LL WONDER HOW YOU MANAGED WITHOUT A PROJECTOR"

PROJECTOR GLOSSARY

Confused by projector jargon? Here's what it all means…

AMBIENT LIGHT
☐ Any light created by a source other than the projector or screen.

COLOUR TEMPERATURE
☐ A method of measuring the 'whiteness' of a light source. Metal halide lamps produce higher temperatures than halogen or incandescent lights.

CONTRAST RATIO
☐ The ratio between white and black. The larger the contrast ratio, the greater the ability of a projector to show subtle colour details and tolerate extraneous room light

DIGITAL LIGHT PROCESSING (DLP)
☐ DLP is a light processing system that uses hundreds of thousands of tiny spinning mirrors to reflect images. Many feel it is the most accurate reproduction of colour and images available today.

GHOSTING
☐ A shadow or weak secondary on-screen image which is created by multiple paths of broadcast transmission errors.

INVERT IMAGE
☐ Many projectors that are ceiling mounted are mounted upside down. Invert image corrects the image digitally so your projected image is the right way up.

KEYSTONE CORRECTION
☐ The projector's ability to correct the effects of 'pointing up' or 'pointing down' on a screen, thus creating a true rectangular image.

LCD (LIQUID CRYSTAL DISPLAY)
☐ This technology comes in many forms, sizes and resolutions. Its primary purpose is to present a digital image for viewing.

PROJECTION AXIS
☐ The direction of an imaginary line that extends from the centre of the projection lens through to the centre of the screen.

THROW DISTANCE
☐ Length of the projection beam required for a projector to produce an image of a desired size.

games™ USA REPORT

LETTER FROM AMERICA

WITH YOUR FRIENDLY EX-PATRIOT, THE SHAPE

"XBCONNECT BRINGS FUNCTIONAL ONLINE PLAY TO A NUMBER OF XBOX GAMES THAT WERE NOT DESIGNED TO BE PLAYED OVER THE INTERNET"

You won't have seen *Gamer's Happy Hour*. It's only on in America, and not very much of America. A good measure of reasoning suggests it's possibly only on in my town. Nevertheless, every two weeks a wonderful new episode airs. It matters not that the morsels of gameage are slightly stale by the time they reach the tube; our host, Gabe, personifies the die-hard games player, and for that he's a treat to watch. The show comes to us from Gabe's bedroom. He's moderately unkempt, appears to be in his early twenties (it's dark in there) and over his shoulder we can see the worn and sagging couch that – as I've learned – he sleeps on.

All 'production' is handled on the fly during filming by the presenter. One camera is pointed at Gabe in his comfy old chair; he reaches offscreen – clunk – throws a switch, and we're looking dead-on at his TV, through which his various consoles are connected. You can see the volume bars go up when he wants to show you something, as he narrates in a loose, non-scripted style. Like you're his mate and you've gone round to see his new games.

The programme's often depressed and grimy host may not have the Reader's Wives appeal of Emily Booth, but he can tell you more about the background of *Soul Reaver 2*'s characters than you previously believed existed. This is guerrilla gaming, raw and truthful, and as such 30 minutes of *Gamer's Happy Hour*, rough as it is, can often be more valuable than two hours spent reading one of the hopelessly corporate-compromised games journals that are so popular here.

Granted, being on public access cable, it's book-ended by a paranoid camcorder epic on the New World Order and a bitter old episode of *May To December* that someone taped off the BBC fifteen years ago, but Gabe makes the slot his own.

He's not the only one taking matters into his own hands; even "amateur" programmers are making the gaming world a better place. Bedroom coders on this side of the Atlantic are responsible for some delightful developments of late. One such lad, who goes only by the handle Hiryu, has released SNES-Station, a sturdy and highly compatible Super Nintendo emulator for PlayStation2 that is entirely free. As a spin-off project, a gent named Nick Van Veen up in Canada has achieved a similarly impressive feat with PGEN, a Mega Drive/Genesis emulator, also for PS2. Getting these programs correctly burned onto CD and then running on your console is not the simplest of processes at the moment, but they're absolutely brilliant products which shift ROM gaming from the small screen and keyboard to the big screen, sofa and joypad.

Additionally, a scattered group of talented fanatics collectively known as Team-XBC has developed some wonderful and, frankly, essential software in the form of XBConnect. In a nutshell, XBConnect brings functional online play to a number of Xbox games that were not designed to be played over the



The charming and fragrant *Ape Escape 2* won't hit the States for a few months yet. Aren't we the lucky ones, eh?



Internet. They say it works by telling your Xbox that you are merely playing against other gamers in the same room via an ordinary link cable, when in fact they can be anywhere on Earth. It doesn't matter how it works! You're playing *TimeSplitters 2* on the Net!

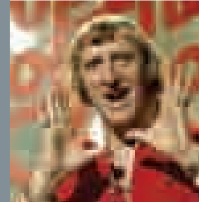
If only it was all so rosy. The release date Nazis inform me that I shall be waiting until at least July for a US version of *Ape Escape 2*, a game that I firmly believe will be the best 3D platformer since, well, *Ape Escape*. This despite the fact that it was 1) developed in Japan, so already exists in NTSC and 2) released some time ago in your own frigid land, so has already been translated into English. By God, why must they do this to me? Who's in charge? Give me names. I'll go after them, then I'll go after their families.

Every day now on the radio there are commercials for Norad, an anti-radiation drug: "In the wake of a nuclear attack on the homeland, fallout could reach for hundreds of miles!" The official terror threat level fluctuates only between 'High' and 'Elevated' (never 'You'll Be Fine' or even 'Sure, Go Shopping, It's Probably Okay'). My point being that some gaming distraction would be nice, and I just can't think of… ooh, look! Gabe's on channel 27.

Cheers The Shape

MISS ABOUT BRITAIN…

Top Of The Pops

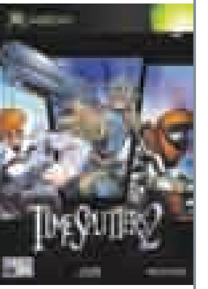


LOVE ABOUT AMERICA…

Mega Casinos



Finally, *GTA: Vice City* has been knocked off the top spot with our US cousins preferring *Midnight Club II*.



Want to play TimeSplitters2 on the Net? It's easy. Just don't tell Bill Gates…

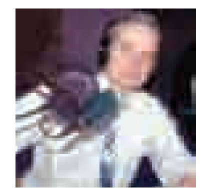
WANT ANY QUESTIONS ANSWERED BY THE SHAPE? THEN DROP HIM A LINE AT: theshape@comcast.net … HE MIGHT LISTEN, IF YOU'RE LUCKY.

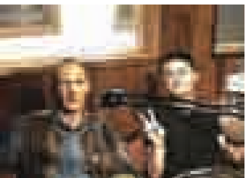
AMERIKAAN

PRODUCTS, PLACES, SERVICES AND EVENTS FROM THE LAND OF THE FREE

NPR

Or National Public Radio. You know that station in *GTA: Vice City* that's very artsy and patronising? This is the real one. Lots of right-on discussion and baffling musical performances.





US MULTIFORMAT TOP TEN

	Title	Publisher	Format
1	Midnight Club II	Rockstar	Multi
2	Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell	Ubi Soft	Multi
3	Def Jam Vendetta	EA	Multi
4	GTA: Vice City	Rockstar	PS2
5	Yu-Gi-Oh! Duelists Of The Roses	Konami	PS2
6	All-Star Baseball 2004	Acclaim	Multi
7	DragonBall Z: Budokai	Infogrames	PS2
8	Conflict: Desert Storm	SCi	Multi
9	The Legend Of Zelda: The Wind Waker	Nintendo	GC
10	Red Faction II	THQ	Multi

(Updated 22/04/03)



Midnight Club II

Def Jam Vendetta

KONGETSU*

WITH JAPANESE CORRESPONDENT OLLIE BARDER

"FOR A NATION THAT WAS ONCE ONE OF THE MOST ECONOMICALLY WORLD, TO HAVE A SECOND-RATE ECONOMY REALLY



One of the many parts of Japanese culture revolves around enforced superficial harmony called 'wa'. This means that if you want to make a game and give the punters what they want, it'll be very difficult. Confused? Allow me to explain.

For example, each morning there is a meeting for items to be discussed for the day, yet nobody really mentions anything constructive for fear of stepping on anyone else's feet. This means that you're forced to keep the harmony within the group. So even if you hate a certain aspect of the game that you're creating, you're not expected to express your opinion freely when the group thinks it's fantastic, as your expression of disappointment would go against the group's favour. As a result, you have to look at your colleagues' facial expressions in order to gauge their opinions and then carefully guess the limits of your comments. In Japan, when they make omelettes they don't break any eggs.

Anyone with an ounce of common sense should be able to see that this state of affairs will cripple any modicum of creativity. Actually though, it's more complicated than that. The above example is of negative 'wa', so there is obviously a positive kind.

As many of you will know, Japan has led the charge on games innovation and creativity for the past thirty years. The mentality of trying to get along with everybody has paid huge dividends, at least when the going was good, that is. Yet since the economy has taken a nosedive, a sense of ubiquitous pessimism has set in.

Literally the moment I got to Japan, I was 'informed' that Japan's economy was in dire straits. For a nation that was once one of the most economically powerful entities in the world, to be in possession of a second-rate economy really freaks many Nihonjin out. They're getting worried for a good reason though and, unfortunately, it's affected the games industry here too.

Fumito Ueda's *Ico* and Tetsuya Mizuguchi's *Rez* are brilliant games and critically acclaimed the world over. So, did they sell? Nope. What about Shigeru Miyamoto's latest creations, *Super Mario Sunshine* and *The Wind Waker*? No. Seeing a pattern here? It isn't as though they were released for some esoteric black and green monstrosity either; these were PlayStation2 and Gamecube games. So what does this mean exactly? Has games journalism lost its touch with the punters (not an unreasonable assumption, especially if you knew how many 'gamer lifestyle' muppets there are in the business)? Or are Japanese developers not making games that gamers want to play?

You have to realise that Japanese culture is immaculately superficial and whilst that oppression used to force excessive



TEACH YOURSELF JAPANESE

LESSON SIX: A VISIT TO THE BANK

Koza o kaiyakushiyo to omoimasu	I'm looking to close my account
Doyukotodesuka, watashino okanewa issenmo nai to iunodesuka?	What do you mean, you haven't got my money?
Meiwakunante kaketeimasenyo…	I'm not causing a disturbance…
Chyotto! Teo hanashinasai! Konnakoto surumonjya arimasen!	Hey! Get your hands off me! You can't do this!
Oh… kuso	Oh… shit

POWERFUL ENTITIES IN THE FREAKS MANY NIHONJIN OUT"

bouts of innovation and creativity onto repressed geeky game designers, it will no longer work now. This produces a rather delicious conundrum.

If the main force of focus is removed, as in oppressive social form, will Japanese game designers be able to stay as creative and will the games remain quintessentially Japanese? I know what you're thinking: 'Don't be silly! Of course they will, they're Japanese'. Really? Thing is, we really don't know how the faeces will hit the fan, nor whether there will be any nuts contained therein. The thing about cultural change (and it *is* happening within Japan) is that you don't really know what the outcome will be. Admittedly, there will be many Nathan Barley wannabes spouting off predictive nonsense, but the truth is that no-one knows how this sucker will pan out. Not even me.

What I do know is that the resultant cultural carnage will be pretty impressive – we have got over thirty years of oppression to make up for, after all. But at least when it comes to games, the consumer will always win.

Kind regards



Japanese banks have given all their money away. Damn fools.

DOOM AND GLOOM

You can't turn the telly on here without hearing some prediction that Japan is 'doomed', but what's worse is that nobody is doing anything about it. The negative effects of 'wa' are a big deal when they hit the higher echelons of Japanese rule. For example, many of the Japanese banks (and when I say many, I mean all) have given out huge loans to their geezer mates (or the closest Japanese equivalent), only to have them remain unpaid. This means that the government has had to subsidise these wondrous acts of monetary folly.

Thankfully, Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi has said that enough is enough. Naturally, we all thought that this would mean that he would promptly get banks to stop being so stupid and only lend money to people that could realistically pay the money back (and to watch out for anyone with tattoos and snakeskin shoes).

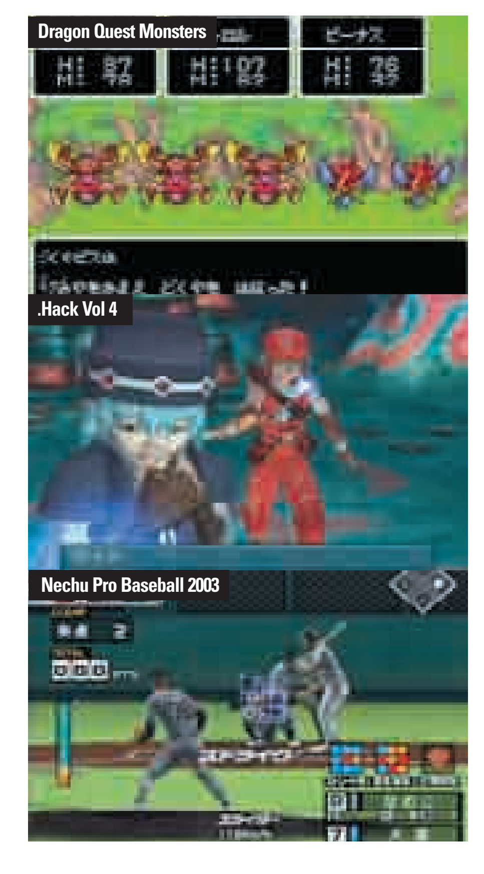
Of course, that's what he probably thought about doing, but since he took office he has done precious little to correct matters. This means that these huge loans will reach a critical mass in a few years, enough to engulf the entire Japanese economy in one big gulp. Obviously, the ramifications of this are terrifying, not only for the Japanese games industry but for the whole world…

I hope you enjoyed that little lesson in (let's face it, utterly fascinating) economics – don't come crying to me when you say I don't teach ya nuffink, eh?

JAPANESE MULTIFORMAT TOP TEN

	Title	Publisher	Format
1	.Hack Vol.4	Bandai	PS2
2	Dragon Quest Monsters	Enix	GBA
3	Nechu Pro Baseball 2003	Namco	PS2
4	Naruto	Tomy	GC
5	Made In Wario	Nintendo	GBA
6	2nd Super Robot Taisen Alpha	Banpresto	PS2
7	Final Fantasy X-2	Square	PS2
8	Taiko No Tetsujin: Doki!	Namco	PS2
9	DoDonPachi Daiouiyo	Akira	PS2
10	Zelda: A Link To The Past	Nintendo	GBA

(Dengeki Console Game Ranking Top 50, week ending 13/04/03)



"I THINK WE ARE GOING TO SEE BIPOLARISATION OF COMPANIES – ONES THAT DEVELOP SOMETHING NEW AND ONES THAT IMPROVE EXISTING GENRES"

KUJYO KAZUMA, IREM INC.

KUJYO KAZUMA

IREM INC.

The Japanese game developer and publisher IREM has something of a chequered past. From being one of the major players in the arcade industry during the Eighties to going bankrupt during the Nineties, it's a much-appreciated miracle that such a solid developer has somehow survived in the turbulent global games market.

It's somewhat ironic too, considering IREM's choppy past, that one of their employees, Kujyo Kazuma, created one of the most refreshingly different and deservedly popular games of recent years. *Zettai Zetsumei Toshi* (aka *SOS: The Final Escape*) was an innovative take on the survival horror genre where the player has to survive an unpredictable earthquake-ridden landscape rather than bloodthirsty zombies. "The game was based on a film called *Nippon Chinbotsu* from 1973," says Kazuma. "It's been stuck in my mind ever since I saw it as a child, so I thought about expressing what I felt when I saw the film in the form of a videogame somehow." Both a critical and financial success, there's even a possibility of a sequel, although Kazuma-san is not at liberty to divulge details.

Originally from Osaka, Japan, Kujyo Kazuma has worked at IREM for quite some time. Before *Zettai Zetsumei Toshi* he had an equally illustrious games industry career spanning all the way back to the creation of *R-Type II*. "Sadly, I was not directly involved with the arcade versions of *R-Type*. When I joined IREM they were working on *R-Type II*, so I was roped in to test-play it through," he laughs. Thankfully, it seems this involvement with the *R-Type* series is a good omen. In 1998, Kazuma worked as chief planner for *R-Type Delta* and now, in 2003, he's the main producer for the last ever *R-Type* game, *R-Type Final*.

Naturally, the big question is why this latest title is going to be the last *R-Type*. "The biggest reason was that the shoot-'em-up genre has stopped getting attention from players," Kazuma says, disappointed. "These games have stopped selling. The players, distributors, games magazines, managers of game companies and developers, all of them take less and less interest in shoot-'em-ups. So if it was left to its own devices, I felt that *R-Type* would be gradually forgotten. Then I thought about developing *R-Type Final*, the last milestone-esque *R-Type* game before our company loses the know-how in making shoot-'em-up games."

Sad, but true. Nevertheless, the fact that this is going to be the last *R-Type* game has given IREM free reign to pull out all the stops with this one – particularly when it comes to the immense amount of ships available in the game. "Many of the *R-Type* airframes, as well as other airframes from old IREM shoot-'em ups, such as *Image Fight* or *Mr Heli's Big Adventure*, will appear in *R-Type Final*," reveals Kazuma-san. "They have all been given very characteristic designs and have their own weapon types. Moreover, these airframes will be added and developed in the manner of a family tree, and this is the main characteristic of the game."

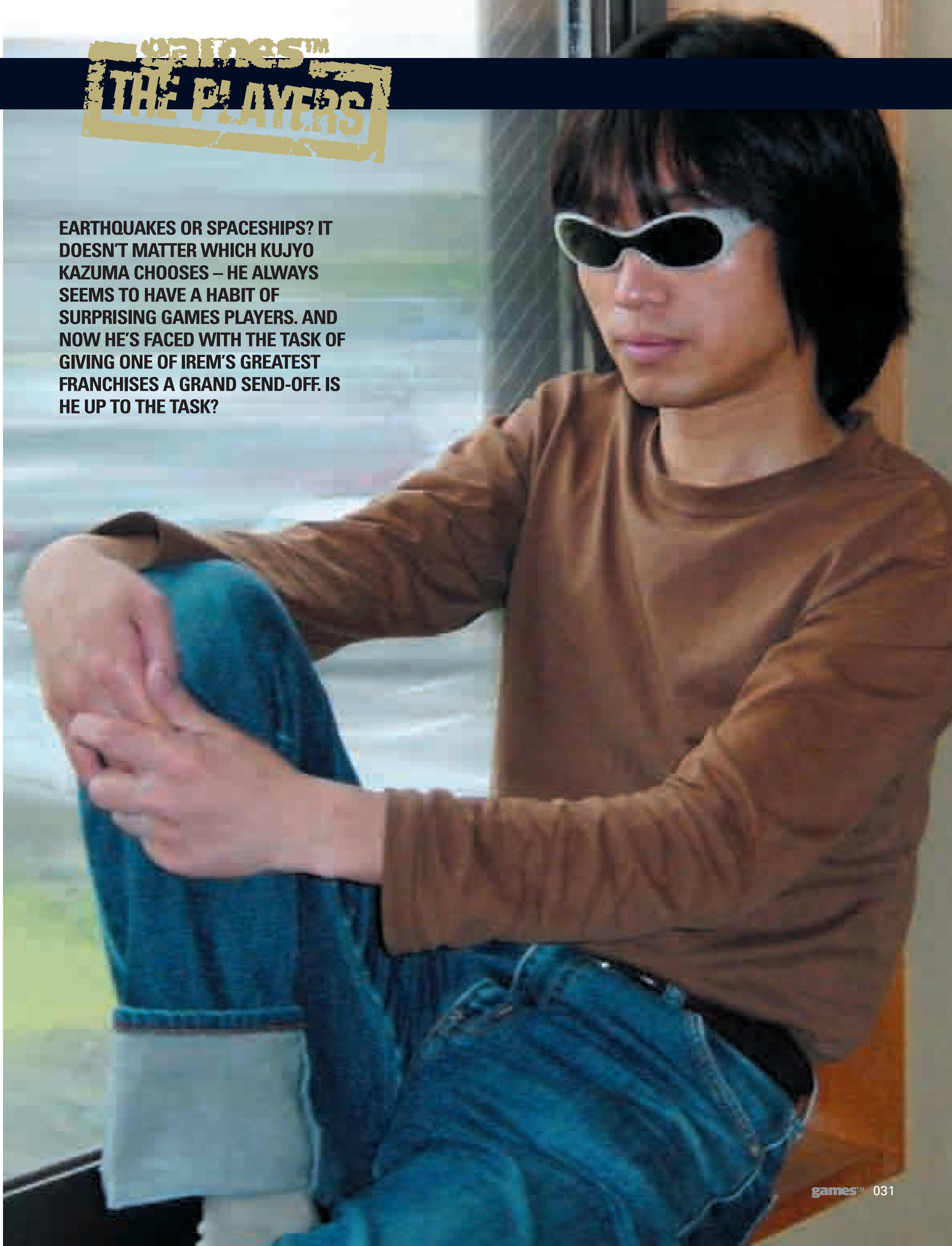
Along with all these new ships, multiple Force types will also be present – after all, the Force power-up system is probably the most renowned aspect of *R-Type*. Thankfully, Kazuma is acutely aware of this. "The point of the game, I think, lies in the strengthening the Force, which is a separate entity from the player," he says. "Yet the Force is made from Bydo flesh. It is a part of the enemy but it is also your most reliable ally. To defeat the Bydo at the end of each game, the Force's energy had to be used to its limit. What is different with *R-Type Final*, from other *R-Type* games, is the way the Force energy will open. It will be far more magnificent than ever before."

While *R-Type Final* clearly appears to be in good hands, Kazuma remains concerned for the future of the worldwide games industry. "I think we are going to see bipolarisation of companies," he muses, "ones which develop something new and ones that concentrate on improving the existing genres. So far, the major companies have done both but in the future they will tend towards the latter. Going towards the latter is the reason why Japanese manufacturers are hurrying to form joint enterprises. Other than that, as the number of people who play games expands, games will be developed in many countries and these games will be distributed worldwide. In this situation, each developer and company will face more fierce competition while their meaning of existence will be severely challenged."

It sounds rather bleak, but as long as the industry keeps going long enough for us to see *R-Type Final*, we'll be happy…



R-Type Final is scheduled for release in Japan on 19 June for the PlayStation2 and is previewed on page 52.



EARTHQUAKES OR SPACESHIPS? IT DOESN'T MATTER WHICH KUJYO KAZUMA CHOOSES – HE ALWAYS SEEMS TO HAVE A HABIT OF SURPRISING GAMES PLAYERS. AND NOW HE'S FACED WITH THE TASK OF GIVING ONE OF IREM'S GREATEST FRANCHISES A GRAND SEND-OFF. IS HE UP TO THE TASK?

COMMUNITY

EVERY ISSUE, games™ GOES BEHIND THE SCENES WITH A DEVELOPER. THIS MONTH MINDS EYE OPENS ITS DOORS TO US



Starsky & Hutch aims to capture all the superfly ambience of the show.



MINDS EYE PRODUCTIONS

THE WOLVERTON BASED DEVELOPER REVEALS ALL ABOUT SEVENTIES CAR CHASES, PRESENT-DAY PROJECTS AND THE FUTURE OF INTERACTIVE TV GAMING

Wolverton may already be renowned the world over as home of the Royal Train (no, really), yet this tiny settlement just outside Milton Keynes is famous for very little else. But it's a status that could be about to change – in gaming circles at any rate – if forthcoming multiformat release *Starsky & Hutch* has what it takes to put local developer Minds Eye, and Wolverton, firmly on the map. While the studio's portfolio of mostly family-oriented titles have enjoyed a fair amount of success since the team's formation in 1995, the last couple of years have really seen Minds Eye progress towards the big time with both the *Starsky* project and, more curiously, by spearheading the evolution of interactive TV (iTV) gaming.

Not many games developers out there could genuinely claim to be world leaders in their chosen field, but that's exactly what Minds Eye has achieved in terms of iTV gaming. Yet it's a situation managing director Martin Batten remains modest about: "It's almost by default that we've become one of the key players in all this by being a major supplier of games to Sky from quite early on," he admits. "Since Sky are not only leaders in the UK but actually have the largest user base of any satellite delivery company in the world, we're pretty much leading the way for iTV gaming worldwide."

Gaming has proved to be a much more lucrative by-product of iTV than Sky ever really imagined, whereas other features like email and access to the Internet have failed to enjoy similar success. Lead programmer Bennie Affleck (steady ladies) explains the latest way in which Mr Murdoch is getting us to part with our pennies: "Nowadays, Sky offers games on a pay-to-play basis, so you'll pay your

Wolverton in Buckinghamshire was once an important part of the railway industry, but is now home to more diverse businesses, such as Minds Eye Productions.



Minds Eye with their very own pimp-mobile. For research purposes.

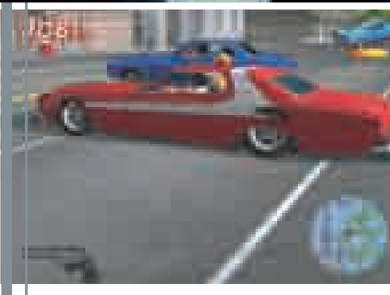












Starsky & Hutch sees you driving and shooting your way around the city to boost your ratings while picking up perps, narcs and crims.

50p or 75p to play the game for as long as you want in one sitting or you can pay to have access to the game for 24 hours." Okay, so the games you'll find on iTV may be a little primitive by today's technological standards, but things have advanced a fair bit since gaming was first introduced on digital TV. "Going back to the early days you had a lot of very simple puzzle games and card games that were free to play," Batten recounts. "It was really *Tetris* that kicked off the whole pay-to-play thing about two years ago and did very, very well getting around 4 million plays. The second phase saw us developing games based on a lot of old retro licences that we could get to run on the limited power of the set-top box, such as *Space Invaders* and classic Atari titles like *Pong*, *Asteroids* and *Centipede*. Now we're at the third phase where things have really opened up and it seems pretty much anything goes."

With its recent groundbreaking adaptation of the *Tomb Raider* franchise and an influx of projects based on popular TV shows such as *Who Wants to be a Millionaire?*, Minds Eye is keen to remain the driving force behind iTV gaming as it really starts to take off. New concepts we could see coming to our Sky remotes in the near future may well include one-on-one beat-'em-ups, titles that use scrolling technology and even an iTV version of *Dance Dance Revolution*. "Our guys have really raised the bar for everyone else and pushed the whole thing forwards technologically and graphically," Batten says. "Experimenting to achieve what no-one else has done before on a set-top box is pretty exciting." And considering how *Space Invaders* managed to attract over 4.5 million plays in its first 12 months, the potential for iTV gaming should not be underestimated, as Batten reminds us: "One of the benefits of selling games through Sky is the fact that you've got something like 7 million households out there with potential gaming machines sitting in their living room, which is about as many as there were PSones at its height."

While there are surely some interesting times ahead for the iTV games development team, the company has recently been focusing most of its resources on the massive *Starsky & Hutch* project. Determined that the title should enjoy a level of success that would firmly establish Minds Eye as a major developer of PC and console games, a team of around 25 people are currently completing the final stages of a two-year slog. "Obviously, in times gone by you could actually work on two or three games at once, but with *Starsky & Hutch* we had to bring all the separate teams within the company together because it's a much bigger project," Batten says. Minds Eye had previously collaborated with publisher Empire on the refreshingly original game *Sheep*, and Batten also believes the

"TRYING TO ACHIEVE WHAT NO-ONE ELSE HAS DONE BEFORE ON A SET-TOP BOX IS PRETTY EXCITING"

MARTIN BATTEN, MANAGING DIRECTOR



1 BEN EVERETT, Lead Designer (*S&H*)
Favourite game: *Panzer Dragoon Saga*

2 STUART MIDDLETON, Lead Programmer (*S&H*)
Favourite game: *Resident Evil: Code Veronica*

3 JULIAN SCOTT, Lead Programmer (*S&H*)
Favourite game: Old-school arcade titles

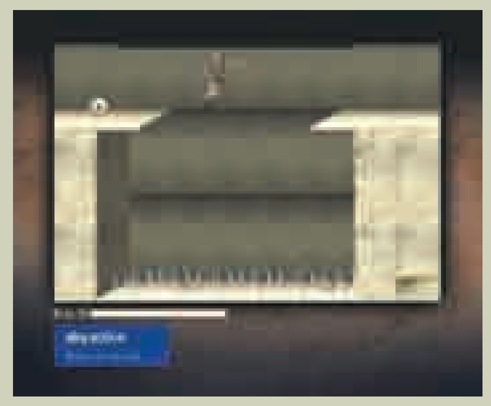
4 DAVID PRICE, Lead Artist (*S&H*)
Favourite game: *Halo, Bomberman* (multiplayer)

01

02

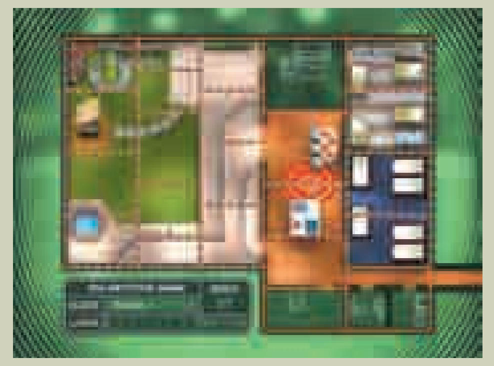
NOBODY DOES IT BETTER?

The Minds Eye portfolio of interactive TV (iTV) games covers a range of genres, with some familiar faces cropping up here and there…



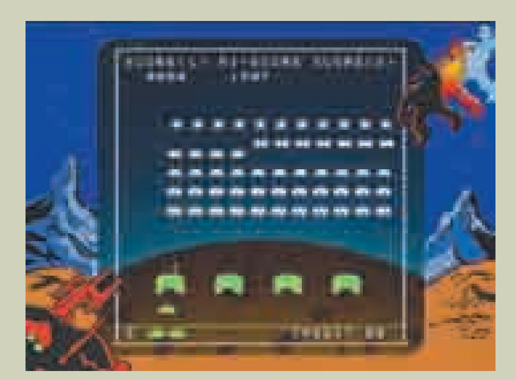
TOMB RAIDER

Episodic gaming is a feature enabled by the medium of iTV, and this is the first of its kind



BIG BROTHER 3

Games are now an important part of many TV shows' interactive content



SPACE INVADERS

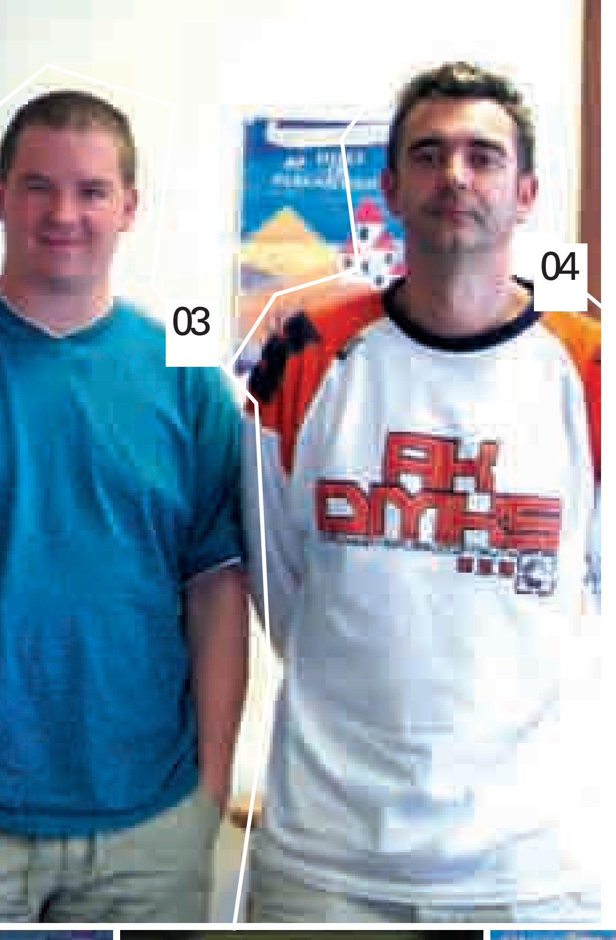
Timeless retro classics are ideal candidates for conversion onto iTV

company's strong track record with licensed games was key to them securing the opportunity to work on such a high-profile title: "I think because we've had so much experience working with licenses before, both as a company and collectively, we were trusted with this particular project."

Lead programmers Stuart Middleton and Julian Scott certainly have no shortage of experience between them in that department, having worked with such prestigious licences as *Robocop*, *The Simpsons* and *The Addams Family*. "The *Starsky & Hutch* licence has been a really easy one to work with," reflects Middleton. "There have been very few licensing issues. I've worked on other games where it has been absolutely horrendous. We had Matt Groening calling us up complaining that the shade of yellow we were using for the Simpsons wasn't the right shade." Other stars can get tetchy too if they don't think the finished game will be quite to their liking. "On *Waterworld*, Kevin Costner demanded to have his hair coloured in because we weren't allowed to give him a bald spot," Scott recalls.

"STARSKY & HUTCH WAS ALWAYS GOING TO BE A POST-PUB ENTERTAINMENT GAME AND WE WANTED TO RECREATE THE WHOLE 'BUDDY COP' SCENARIO"

BEN EVERETT, LEAD DESIGNER



HOT OFF THE PRESS…

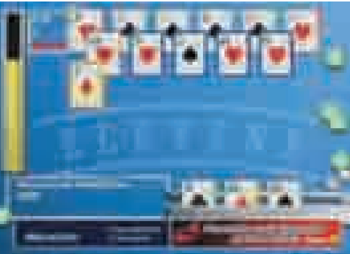
Starsky & Hutch **may be the first of many top-selling titles to come out of Wolverton if Minds Eye's follow-up project turns out to be as interesting as it sounds. Martin Batten told us about their new snap-'em-up:**

"We've been working on the early concepts for a game called *Paparazzi* – you'll basically be playing a paparazzi photographer who'll be set tasks to photograph certain AI-controlled characters who might be politicians or celebrities. There'll be a number of publications you can choose to take jobs from, from *The Times*-type of paper right through to something like *Razzle* where you might have to catch your target in compromising positions."

"We'll use the same base engine as *Starsky & Hutch*," reveals lead programmer Stuart Middleton, "but we're going to expand on it so you'll be able to get out of the car and walk around. When we first came up with the *Paparazzi* idea, we did a quick test where we put some *Paparazzi* elements into the *Starsky* engine. Within a few days we had already attached it to a person and could walk that person around the city."

Whether *Paparazzi* will have the humour found in *Starsky & Hutch* or *Sheep* remains to be seen: "We could go down quite a dark route with this one I suppose, or keep it very tongue-in-cheek," says Batten. "The jury's out on that at the moment, but the publisher who takes it on will have an effect on which route we go down."







Minds Eye's digital games cover a wide variety of genres from the classic *Centipede* and *Pong* to the more recent *Banzai Pinball* (no, we're not sure either).

The lack of problems encountered by the team in working with the *Starsky & Hutch* licence has been largely due to how loosely Minds Eye's light-hearted creation actually ties in with the hit TV show, as lead designer Ben Everett explains: "I think most people will have the idea that *Starsky & Hutch* was all about driving down alleyways and smashing through boxes, but if you watch the show there isn't too much of that actually going on. We wanted to give them their all-action version of *Starsky & Hutch*, and leave out some of the show's darker themes that wouldn't translate so well." The game's tongue-in-cheek homage to the over-the-top car chases seen in TV cop shows of the Seventies and Eighties is achieved through innovative features such as a viewer rating score that rewards players for driving 'entertainingly', while the much-hyped combination of lightgun and steering wheel control systems makes for some thrilling arcade-style action. "It was always going to be a post-pub entertainment game," says Everett, "and we wanted to go as far as possible to recreate the whole 'buddy cop' scenario."

Batten is confident that his team of developers has created a game that has all the ingredients to make it a massive success: "It's associated with a big licence and it's a good game in its own right. A *Starsky & Hutch* movie has just gone into shooting, so we're hoping for another boost of interest in the game when the film gets released next year. So yeah, it will really put us on the map if this one takes off and sells in big numbers." With a potential hit title just on the horizon, and more ideas for witty and original gameplay concepts up their sleeve with the likes of *Paparazzi*, the talented team at Minds Eye are facing the prospect of some rather promising times ahead. And though it may yet be unclear exactly how exciting the future will be for iTV gaming, you can pretty much guarantee that Minds Eye will be right there at the forefront of its success.

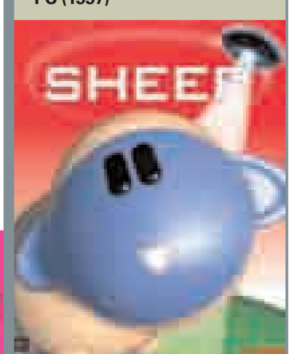
HISTORY LESSONS

Many of the studio's previous titles have been aimed at the family market, based on licences such as Noddy, *Pac-Man* and Thomas The Tank Engine.

SHEEP
PC, PSone (2000)

MONOPOLY WORLD CUP
PC (1998)

COMBAT CHESS
PC (1997)





RELEASE LISTS



Amplitude PS2
Get your rhythm action fix on page 74

True Crime: Streets of L.A. PS2, Xbox, GC
Activision's answer to *GTA* is previewed on page 56

Def Jam Vendetta PS2, GC
Check out EA's latest wrestler on page 110



MOST PLAYED

POKÉMON RUBY/SAPPHIRE

Format: Game Boy Advance
Developer: Nintendo

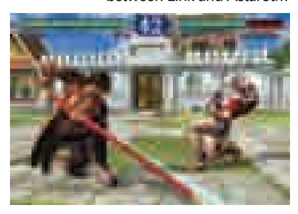
We just can't get enough of Nintendo's lovable little critters. Both versions are getting plenty of play, with multiplayer link-up battles causing particular chaos. It isn't possible to catch them all at the moment, but that doesn't stop us getting excited thinking about how Nintendo will introduce the remaining monsters.



SOUL CALIBUR II

Format: PS2, GameCube, Xbox
Developer: Namco

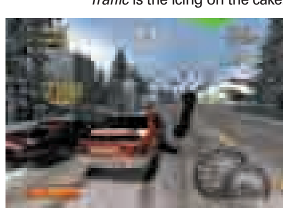
We loved the Dreamcast version of the original *Soul Calibur* and Namco's sequel is every bit as good. The fighting's fast and furious and the game looks gorgeous – plus we can finally reveal the answer to a question that's plagued gamers for years. Who would win out of a scrap between Link and Astaroth?



BURNOUT 2

Format: PS2, GameCube, Xbox
Developer: Criterion

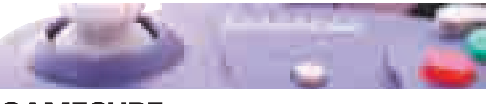
Acclaim's fantastic racer has finally arrived on GameCube and Xbox and we can't stop playing the bugger. The extra tracks are getting a serious workout and are providing plenty of high-speed thrills and spills. The ability to rip your own tracks to the Xbox version and drive to *Crosstown Traffic* is the icing on the cake.





PLAYSTATION2

Month	Title	Publisher	
MAY			
23 May	Dancing Stage Mega Mix	Konami	Wanted
23 May	Def Jam Vendetta	Electronic Arts	
23 May	Silent Hill 3	Konami	Wanted
23 May	Run Like Hell	Empire	
30 May	Frogger Beyond	Konami	
30 May	Pro Beach Soccer	Wanadoo	
30 May	SOCOM: US Navy Seals	SCEE	
30 May	Tomb Raider: Angel of Darkness	Eidos	
30 May	Inquisition	Wanadoo	
TBC	Black & Bruised	Vivendi	
TBC	Pillage	Zed Two	
JUNE			
6 June	Shaun Murray's Pro Wakeboarding	Activision	
13 June	The Hulk	Vivendi	
20 June	Starsky & Hutch	Empire	
TBC	Batman: Dark Tomorrow	Wanadoo	
TBC	Dark Chronicle	SCEE	Wanted
TBC	Dungeons & Dragons: Heroes	Infogrames	
TBC	Evil Dead: A Fistful Of Boomstick	THQ	
TBC	Eyetoy	SCEE	
TBC	Futurama	SCi	
TBC	Indiana Jones And The Emperor's Tomb	LucasArts	
TBC	Yu-Gi-Oh: Duelists of the Roses	Konami	
TBC	Xenosaga	SCEE	
JULY			
18 July	Mace Griffin: Bounty Hunter	Vivendi	
TBC	Gladius	LucasArts	
TBC	Dragon's Lair 3D	THQ	
TBC	Everybody's Golf 3	SCEE	
TBC	Pac-Man Fever	SCEE	
AUGUST			
TBC	Alter Echo	THQ	
TBC	The Great Escape	Sci	
TBC	Falcone: Into The Maelstrom	Virgin	
TBC	Medal Of Honour: Fighter Command	Electronic Arts	
SEPTEMBER			
TBC	A Sound Of Thunder	BAM! Entertainment	
TBC	ATV Off Road Fury 2	SCEE	
TBC	Conflict: Desert Storm II	SCi	
TBC	Driver 3	Infogrames	
TBC	Evolution Snowcross	Konami	
TBC	True Crime: Streets Of L.A.	Activision	Wanted
TBC	Zone Of The Enders: The 2nd Runner	Konami	
OCTOBER			
TBC	Pro Evolution Soccer 3	Konami	
NOVEMBER			
TBC	Ghost Master	Empire	Wanted
TBC	Red Dead Revolver	Capcom	
TBC	Full Throttle II	LucasArts	
TBC	Samurai Jack: The Amulet Of Time	BAM! Entertainment	



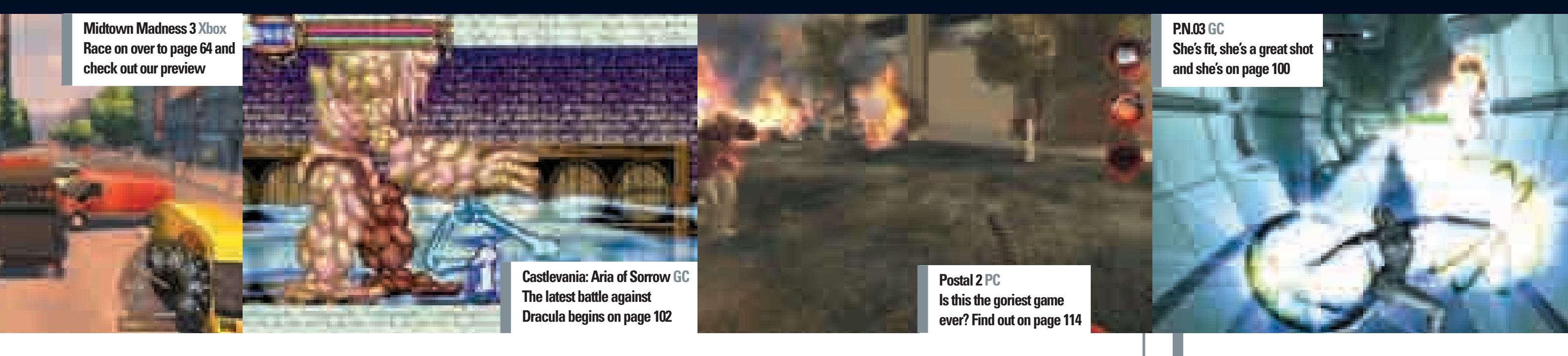
GAMECUBE

Month	Title	Publisher	
MAY			
23 May	BloodRayne	Vivendi	
23 May	Def Jam Vendetta	Electronic Arts	
23 May	Mercedes-Benz World Racing	TDK	
23 May	Skies Of Arcadia: Legends	Infogrames	Wanted
30 May	Frogger Beyond	Konami	
30 May	Outlaw Golf	TDK	
30 May	Red Faction II	THQ	
30 May	Resident Evil 2	Capcom	
TBC	Resident Evil 3: Nemesis	Capcom	
TBC	Darkened Skye	TDK	
TBC	SX Superstar	Acclaim	
JUNE			
TBC	Dr Muto	Midway	
6 June	Splinter Cell	UbiSoft	
13 June	Big Mutha Truckers	Empire	
13 June	The Hulk	Vivendi	
13 June	F1 Career Challenge	Electronic Arts	
20 June	Black & Bruised	Vivendi	
27 June	V-Rally 3	Infogrames	
TBC	Futurama	SCi	
TBC	Hitman 2: Silent Assassin	Eidos	Wanted
SEPTEMBER			
5 September	Starsky & Hutch	Empire	
12 September	Conan	TDK	
26 September	The Hobbit	Vivendi	
TBC	True Crime: Streets Of L.A.	Activision	Wanted
OCTOBER			
3 October	Bulletproof Monk	Empire	
TBC	Harvest Moon: A Wonderful Life	UbiSoft	Wanted
TBC	The Powerpuff Girls: Shock Of Ages	BAM! Entertainment	
NOVEMBER			
TBC	Samurai Jack: The Amulet Of Time	BAM! Entertainment	

XBOX

Month	Title	Publisher
MAY		
23 May	F1 Career Challenge	Electronic Arts
23 May	Phantasy Star Online	SEGA
23 May	Yager	THQ
30 May	Red Faction II	TDK
30 May	Robocop	Virgin
TBC	BloodRayne	Vivendi
TBC	Dungeons & Dragons: Heroes	Infogrames
TBC	Return To Castle Wolfenstein	Activision
JUNE		
6 June	Barbarian	Virgin
6 June	Shaun Murray's Pro Wakeboarder	Activision

CALM YOUR FEVERISH ANTICIPATION WITH OUR COMPREHENSIVE LIST OF FORTHCOMING RELEASES



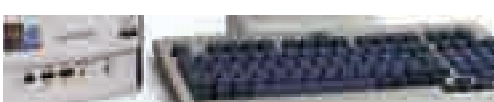
Midtown Madness 3 Xbox
Race on over to page 64 and check out our preview

Castlevania: Aria of Sorrow GC
The latest battle against Dracula begins on page 102

Postal 2 PC
Is this the goriest game ever? Find out on page 114

P.N.03 GC
She's fit, she's a great shot and she's on page 100

13 June	Evil Dead: A Fistful Of Boomstick	THQ	
20 June	Brute Force	Microsoft	
20 June	Starsky & Hutch	Empire	
27 June	Midtown Madness 3	Microsoft	
27 June	World Championship Snooker	Codemasters	
TBC	Dragon's Lair 3D	THQ	
TBC	The Hulk	Vivendi	
TBC	Mace Griffin: Bounty Hunter	Vivendi	
TBC	Knights Of The Old Republic	LucasArts	Wanted
TBC	Vultures	CDV	
JULY			
4 July	Futurama	SCi	
AUGUST			
29 August	NGT: Next Generation Tennis	Wanadoo	
TBC	The Great Escape	SCi	
SEPTEMBER			
5 September	Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon: Island Thunder	UbiSoft	
16 September	Outlaw Volleyball	TDK	
TBC	Black And White	Lionhead	
TBC	Conflict: Desert Storm II	SCi	
TBC	Dino Crisis 3	Capcom	
TBC	Painkiller	DreamCatcher	
TBC	Raven Shield	Ubi Soft	
TBC	XIII	Ubi Soft	Wanted
OCTOBER			
TBC	Bulletproof Monk	Empire	
TBC	Broken Sword: The Sleeping Dragon	THQ	
TBC	Ghost Master	Empire	
TBC	Wallace & Gromit	BAM!	
NOVEMBER			
TBC	Doom III	Activision	Wanted
TBC	Driver 3	Infogrames	
TBC	Ninja Gaiden	Microsoft	Wanted
TBC	Starcraft Ghost	Vivendi	
TBC	Wrath	LucasArts	
DECEMBER			
TBC	BC	Microsoft	
TBC	Thief	Eidos	



PC

Month	Title	Publisher	
MAY			
23 May	The Sims: Superstar	Electronic Arts	
23 May	Ghost Master	Empire	
30 May	Pro Beach Soccer	Wanadoo	
30 May	Red Faction II	THQ	
30 May	Star Trek: Elite Force II	Codemasters	
JUNE			
13 June	The Hulk	Vivendi	
13 June	World Of Warcraft	Vivendi	
20 June	Colin McRae Rally 3	Codemasters	
20 June	Indy Car Series	Codemasters	
27 June	World Championship Snooker	Codemasters	
TBC	Commandos 3: Destination Berlin	Eidos	Wanted
TBC	Dragon's Lair 3D	THQ	
TBC	Heaven And Hell	CDV	
TBC	Neverwinter Nights: Shadows Of Undrentide	Infogrames	
TBC	Omega	DreamCatcher	
TBC	Republic: The Revolution	Eidos	Wanted
TBC	Starsky & Hutch	Empire	
TBC	Tomb Raider: Angel of Darkness	Eidos	
JULY			
4 July	Warcraft 3: The Frozen Throne	Vivendi	
TBC	Breed	CDV	
TBC	Charm of War	Oxygen	
AUGUST			
TBC	The Great Escape	SCi	
SEPTEMBER			
TBC	Apocalyptica	Konami	
TBC	Conflict: Desert Storm II	SCi	
TBC	Ryzom	Wanadoo	
NOVEMBER			
TBC	Doom III	Activision	Wanted



GBA

Month	Title	Publisher	
MAY			
23 May	Made In Wario	Nintendo	Wanted
30 May	GT Advance 3: Concept Racing	THQ	
30 May	Disney Princesses	THQ	
30 May	Wing Commander: Prophecy	Take 2	
TBC	Altered Beast: Guardian Of The Realms	THQ	
TBC	Crazy Taxi: Catch A Ride	THQ	
TBC	Need For Speed: Porsche Unleashed	Zoo	
TBC	The Revenge Of Shinobi	THQ	
JUNE			
6 June	Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell	Ubi Soft	
6 June	Wakeboarding Unleashed	Activision	
13 June	Iridion 3D 2	Vivendi	
13 June	Donkey Kong	Nintendo	Wanted
20 June	The Hulk	Vivendi	
27 June	Magical Quest Starring Mickey & Minnie Mouse	THQ	
27 June	Megaman Battle Network	Capcom	
JULY			
25 July	Pokémon Ruby	Nintendo	Wanted
25 July	Pokémon Sapphire	Nintendo	Wanted
AUGUST			
TBC	Road Rash: Jailbreak	Zoo	
SEPTEMBER			
9 September	Starsky & Hutch	Empire	
26 September	The Hobbit	Vivendi	
TBC	Kirby: Nightmare In Dream Land	Nintendo	

PLEASE NOTE: While every effort has been made to ensure these dates are correct at the time of going to press, they are liable to change at short notice. It's not our fault, really it isn't. We've got notes from our mums to excuse us anyway.

games™ ON THE HORIZON

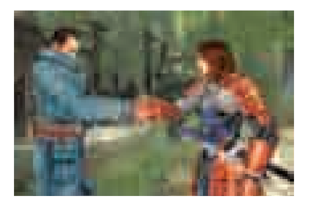
FINAL FANTASY: CRYSTAL CHRONICLES

Format: GameCube
Publisher: Square Enix
We were teased with the (very) early advert at Christmas, but come E3 we'll be able to get our grubby little mitts on one of the most anticipated GameCube games yet. *Crystal Chronicles* seems to have more in common with the classic *Legend Of Mana* than the recent *Final Fantasy X*, but only time will tell…



ONIMUSHA 3

Format: PlayStation2
Publisher: Capcom
Capcom's survival horror franchise gets another sequel with Jean Reno playing a French soldier up to his neck in demons. *Onimusha 3* also sees the return of the stoic samurai Samanosuke from the original game. This title will be using real-time 3D backgrounds like in *Code Veronica* and the upcoming *Biohazard 4*.



SEGA GT ONLINE

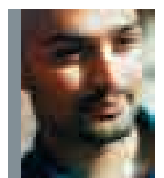
Format: Xbox
Publisher: SEGA
If there's one thing Xbox Live is missing, it's a racing game featuring lush sports cars. Sure, we have *Moto GP* but we want to be tearing around at 100mph in a Lotus or a Ferrari. Although some may baulk that the feature wasn't originally included in *SEGA GT 2002*, it will be nice to finally get on the online race track.



THINK TANK

THE PEOPLE IN THE GAMES INDUSTRY TELL IT LIKE IT IS…

THE DEATH OF AI?



Online gaming is here. In reality, it's been here for a long time, the pursuit of the ardent gamer, stuck in his bedroom with the lights dimmed, sitting on his PC muttering 'l33t sp34k' on his favourite IRC channel. But now the domain of online games edges ever forward to the lounge, with the realities of broadband and console gaming finally bringing global gaming into the light. Why is this exciting? To answer the question, we must really look into what actually makes a good game.

A good game provides a challenge, and one that repays dedication and the development of skill with fun and reward. However, in reality, a good single-player game requires a strong narrative to provide progression to keep you interested enough to progress. Pare that down and what you have is the challenge of the developers indulging you with tasks and AI that you must overcome to 'defeat' their devious minds – the game, in this sense, becomes just an interface to accomplish this.

The development of this 'interface' is where the real future lies. Like any competitive sport, the activity itself is just the means by which you challenge another person. At the cutting edge, no longer will a game's shelf life be dictated by how much of it you can complete, but instead by how good you can get at it, and how much better than the next person you are.

As the era of online console gaming dawns, the challenge for developers will be to see beyond the man-machine interface, but to step into the realms of the man-machine-man interface. The important thing in a game is the experience, and no matter how good AI can get, the experience will never come close to that of defeating 'Real Intelligence' – the one-upmanship and the knowledge that you are better than your opponent. And at the end of the day, isn't that what it all comes down to?

Asam Ahmad is head of PR at SEGA Europe and likes Sonic very, very much



Cheapo *Splinter Cell* anyone? Cut-price *Halo*? Don't mind if we do…

THE PRICE IS RIGHT

MICROSOFT ANNOUNCE A FURTHER PRICE REDUCTION FOR THE XBOX

In another move to firmly position itself in the console industry, Microsoft has once again slashed the price of its Xbox. It's now possible to buy the machine (without any games) for £129.99 – this puts it on equal footing with Nintendo's GameCube and £40 cheaper than Sony's PlayStation2.

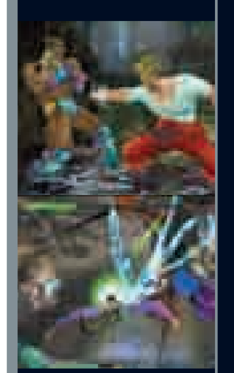
"We had a great Christmas and firmly established ourselves as the number two console in this region," announced Peter Moore, corporate vice president of Microsoft. "We outsold some very long-established competition and enjoyed near sell-out status. This price change shows we are not content to rest on our laurels – we will continue to be aggressive in building upon this momentum throughout the year."

Of course, having a successful Christmas has come at a price for Microsoft. Recent financial figures show rising turnover for all of Microsoft's businesses with the exception of the Home and Entertainment division, which is now showing a year-on-year decline of 42 per cent. Despite the low turnover, Microsoft is on track for meeting its original global Xbox sales target of 9 million by June.

The console has now sold over 2 million units in Europe and is firmly in second place. We're not sure how Nintendo and Sony will respond – but with recent figures showing that Microsoft has around $46 billion to spare, the $325 million lost on the Xbox is small change.

NAMGA?

NAMCO PROPOSE A NEW MERGER DEAL TO SEGA



Namco hardly seems in SEGA's league, so a merger would raise its standing.

Recent rumours suggest that Namco is keen to consolidate a merger with SEGA. This isn't the first time that possible mergers have been mentioned, although they have usually been mooted by the likes of Microsoft, Electronic Arts and, most recently, Sammy.

"It is a fact that Namco proposed a merger with SEGA," said SEGA president Hideki Sato. "On the other hand, business integration plans with Sammy Corporation that have been announced previously have been moving forward. SEGA will continue to discuss these business integration plans with Sammy and also discuss the proposal from Namco."

To say we're surprised by this is a bit of an understatement – Namco is hardly in the same financial league as the likes of money-throwing veterans like Microsoft and EA, and its latest titles haven't performed to expectations. However, if the companies were to merge, the results could be similar to the Square Enix merger and would make SEGA and Namco the fifth largest publisher in Japan, worth around ¥350 billion (£1.86 billion).

PIE IN THE SKY

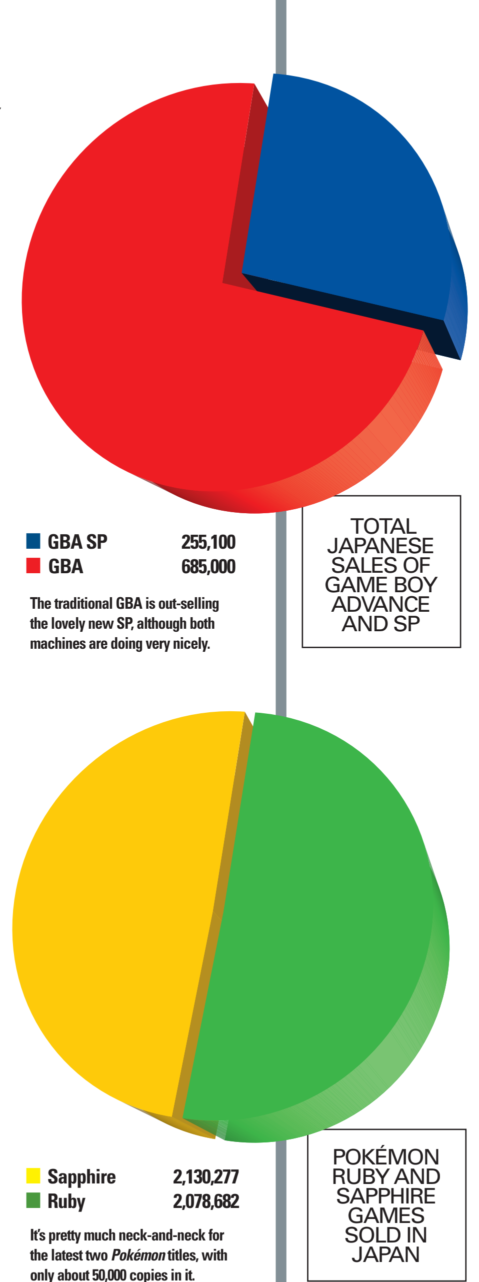
AND THE GAME BOY ADVANCE JUST KEEPS ON SELLING…

The GameCube may not have been the cash cow that Nintendo was hoping for, but its Game Boy Advance is still selling incredibly well. The remodelled SP has been a hit all around the globe and sales show little sign of slowing. When the console launched in Japan earlier this year, it notched up impressive figures of 365,000 in its first month. Europe has also had a very healthy start, with 200,000 units sold in the first two days of sale.

So has this new look been a success for Nintendo? "The key thing here is that we're going for an older target age group," said Shelly Friend, head of PR at Nintendo Europe. "We have been targeting a much more style-conscious, gadget-like person and basically the look and the style of the console appeals more.

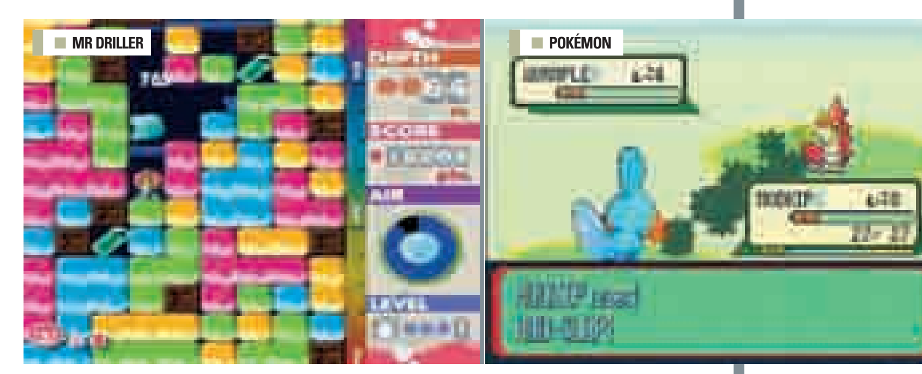
"We've also done some research on the first two days' sales and the average age of a person who has bought an SP was 23. The most interesting thing, however, is that 55 per cent of the people who bought an SP had never had a handheld console before. We're hoping that the 55 per cent have bought it because it is much more stylish."

It's not just Nintendo's handheld that has performed exceptionally well lately. Its *Pokémon* franchise is back with a vengeance and has got off to a flying start with 5.5 million units sold in America and Japan since its launch. As long as Nintendo remains king of the handhelds, it will bring in more than enough revenue to justify making home consoles. While we would love an eventual sequel to the GameCube, Nintendo is going to have to rethink its current strategy if it wishes to make a success of its next venture.



The traditional GBA is out-selling the lovely new SP, although both machines are doing very nicely.

It's pretty much neck-and-neck for the latest two *Pokémon* titles, with only about 50,000 copies in it.



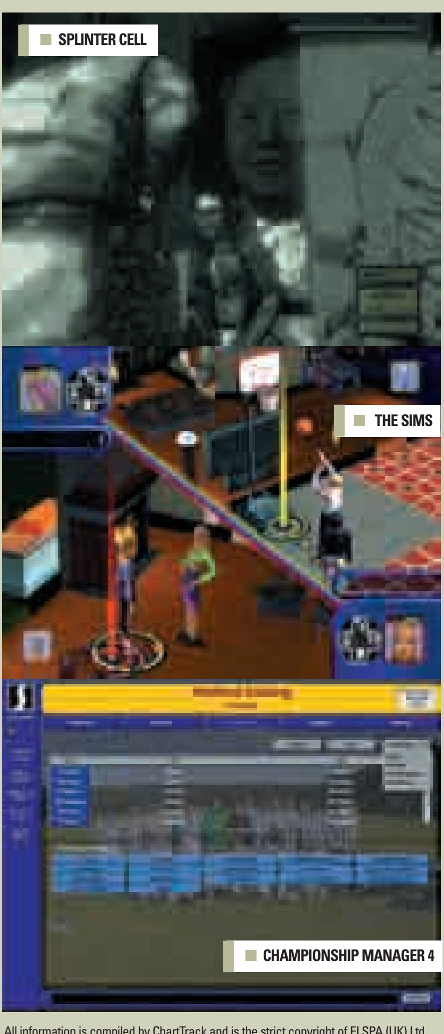
MR DRILLER

POKÉMON

UK MULTIFORMAT TOP TEN

	Title	Publisher	Format
1	**Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell**	Ubi Soft	Multiformat
2	**The Sims**	EA Games	Multiformat
3	**Championship Manager 4**	Eidos	PC
4	**FIFA 2003**	EA Sports	Multiformat
5	**Primal**	SCEE	PS2
6	**X2: Wolverine's Revenge**	Activision	Multiformat
7	**GTA: Vice City**	Rockstar	PS2
8	**Dancing Stage Party Edition**	Konami	PSone
9	**Harry Potter And The Chamber Of Secrets**	EA Games	Multiformat
10	**Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon**	Ubi Soft	Multiformat

■ Thanks to its cross-platform release, Ubi Soft's *Splinter Cell* has received a welcome surge of renewed interest and raced straight to the top of the all-format chart this month. But with only three other decent titles adorning the top ten, it's rather disheartening for anyone who might have hoped that the games industry was turning a corner when it came to quality releases. Here's hoping that E3 brings us better news for the future…



SPLINTER CELL

THE SIMS

CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER 4

UK Full Price Sales Charts (All Formats) (w/e Sat 27 April, 2003)

‘In Japan, when they make omelettes they don’t break any eggs’
Kongetsu, page 28



It’sa me, Mario!
Mario Kart races onto the ’Cube
Page 76

What The Last Ninja did next, exclusively in Retro

With new gBay section

60p England Australia
Thursday
May 22 2003
Published by
Paragon Publishing Ltd

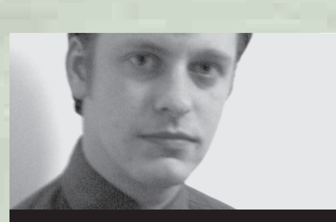
The Galaxian

On the sideline The history of political gaming



Despite their escapist veneer, games are starting to shake off their 'dumb but fun' image to tackle serious political issues, but is this development about to be nipped in the bud?

Gaming and its political issues



Tristan Donovan
near Bournemouth

"Videogames are at the top of the pyramid of mindfuck," spits Kalle Lasn, founder of Adbusters, the anti-globalisation campaigners who made their name with powerful send-ups of adverts by the likes of Calvin Klein and McDonald's (see page 49).

"They are even worse than television in confusing and pacifying people. They are controlled by large corporates who, in trying to make their games super successful, have made them more geared to the lowest common denominator."

Lasn's argument fits into the general view that games are a cultural black hole, unable or unwilling to address social and political issues in the way that films and books do. However, despite the insistence that games and politics don't mix, games are increasingly dipping their toes into political waters, whether it is in the form of Web games or the anti-war message of hits like *Metal Gear Solid*.

"There are more games that are exploring political ideas," says Henry Jenkins, director of comparative media studies at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. "To an extent they have already been doing so in games like *Sim City*, but recently you've had things like the anti-globalisation politics of *State Of Emergency,* and games have become a vehicle for protest through mods and Flash games."

Flash and Shockwave games have proven especially good at turning games into Trojan horses for political ideas. Most are variants on arcade classics like *Asteroids*, as with Global Arcade's anti-brand *Mergeroids*.

Mod tools are also being used to create sophisticated political games such as the post 9/11 *Blood Of Bin Laden* and *Velvet Strike*, a collection of anti-war spray paint mods for use in *Counter-Strike*.

"Games are a good way for us to promote our point," says Mike Slocombe, editor of the Urban 75 Web site, best known for its *Slap A Spice Girl* game. "They lure people into the site and after the game players are sent to a link related to the game. If they were slapping a dictator they'd go to Amnesty International's page on human rights abuses in that country."

Gaming Politics

More news and pictures
Page 47

"In several online games, players have held in-game protests on everything from quibbles over game rules to the terrorist attacks of 9/11"
Tristan Donovan, page 46

"I'm sure ELSPA will chuck me off the board when this is published." Find out who's worried on **page 48**

Games face legal action over content

Tristan Donovan
Freelance Journalist

The rapid spread of protest Web games hasn't escaped the eyes of big business, and several games have had run-ins with lawyers. Urban 75's *Bash Barney The Purple Dinosaur* was changed after legal threats from the owners of the children's cartoon character.

"I got a stroppy email from their lawyers threatening to sue if the game wasn't removed," recalls Slocombe. "I decided to turn it on its head and changed the name to *Baarney* and told them they had 14 days to voice any further objection to the game. This continued until it had turned into something like *Barmy The Transvestite Dinosaur*, and they had spent a fortune on lawyers."

While political Web games have increased, the rise of political content in commercial games has been much lower key, due to nervous developers.

"There is a lot of timidity because games are under fire and the industry doesn't want to antagonise politicians, so it hedges its bets and that may include the removal of politically sensitive content," reckons Jenkins.

Quick Index

Deputy editor: Martin Mathers **Telephone:** 01202 299900 **Email:** news@paragon.co.uk

Leisure

Console manufacturers accused of censorship

Hooligan game runs into difficulties

Tristan Donovan
Freelance Journalist

One victim of industry timidity has been *Hooligans: Storm Over Europe*, an RTS satire on football hooliganism that sparked criticism for its subject matter from within the industry, despite at least two publishers coming very close to signing the title. Eventually, developers Darxabre decided to self-publish the game.

"*Hooligans* was refused for its subject matter at the same time as *State Of Emergency* and *Grand Theft Auto 3* were being published," says Andy Payne, an ELSPA board member who helped Darxabre publish its game. "Violence in games is seen as fine as long as it is dressed up with sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll, so *Hooligans* didn't fit in."

According to Payne, further barriers to including controversial subjects in games other than publisher fear also exist.

"I'm sure ELSPA will chuck me off the board when this is published, but console manufacturers control the content on their consoles, so while you can have *Hooligans* on PC you cannot on PlayStation2. Ninety nine per cent of players

> "Violence in games is seen as fine as long as it is dressed up with sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll"

do not realise that you have that level of censorship," says Payne.

"So in this country console gamers have one US company and two Japanese companies telling people in the UK what they can and cannot play. It is only in games that this situation exists, it does not happen in music, TV or books. You do not have someone saying that to print a book you must use our printing system and we can demand changes to the content, but you do in games."

Although the three big console manufacturers were asked to comment, none were willing or available to discuss the influence they have over political content in games.

Even without controversial subject matter, the task of representing the complexities of politics is still a technical headache, as Elixir Studios – currently working on political strategy title *Republic: The Revolution* – will confirm.



Publishers were reluctant to handle *Hooligans: Storm Over Europe*

Originally, *Republic* was to allow players to create their own detailed political manifesto, but due to technical constraints and concerns about whether people would want that much depth the game's plans were simplified to offer players a choice of left, centre or right-wing stances.

"There is a raft of technical problems that come with trying to portray something like politics, and games have still to reach the stage of doing a proper love story let alone political ideaologies," says Elixir CEO Demis Hassabis.

‘Player-led protest’ meets mixed response

Tristan Donovan

It isn't just videogame creators who are pushing games into the political arena. In several online games players have held in-game protests about everything from quibbles over game rules to the terrorist attacks of 11 September.

Most of these player protests are focused on concerns related to the games themselves, such as changes to the rules or spats over bugs and pricing. That said, a few have touched on the real-world, with *EverQuest* players holding a vigil after 9/11 and Argentinean players in Spanish language RPG *Argentum Online* blockading the game's streets after the Argentine economy imploded in early 2002, mimicking the protests in the real streets of Argentina.

But these real-world-themed protests remain rare. Calls for in-game action against *The Sims Online*'s inclusion of McDonald's restaurants in the game fell flat and, surprisingly, *America's Army* – a free FPS from the US Army designed to attract recruits – was left untouched by the protests against the war in Iraq.



Is this the answer?

One solution to player protest about game rules has been tried in eGenesis' online title *A Tale In The Desert*, where players can change the rules by making laws, subject to a democratic vote.

But whether publishers will accept real issues protests in their online games remains to be seen. The games industry is likely to take the line of shopping malls in that the game is a corporate space and protest is not allowed.

"They have already acted in this fashion," says Edward Castronova. "The end user licensing agreement for the game *Earth And Beyond* requires players to avoid disparaging the game, the developers and the owning corporation. Essentially it requires players to abandon free speech."

But not every publisher thinks this way. "We believe in free speech," said NovaLogic president Lee Milligan. "Other players might want to test the proposition that the pen is mightier than the sword."

Online game economics expert Edward Castronova, associate professor of economics at California State Fullerton University, believes protests will grow but most will be concerned with issues related to the game.

"Player-led protest is a growing phenomena," says Castronova. "There are more and more 'permanent' players – people who reside in these game worlds – and these people have the time and energy to put constant pressure on the developers to change the game."

Uncertain future for political games

So where does politics in games go from here? On the whole, publishers are wary of politics (one we approached for this feature mumbled that politics is a "hot potato" and declined to get involved) and the current set-up of the industry doesn't lend itself to tackling controversial subjects.

Furthermore, the throw-away nature of Web games is unlikely to spawn a videogame equivalent of George Orwell's *1984,* and player protest in online games is heavily restricted by publisher control of the in-game world.

But if games are to become more than a poor relation to other entertainment industries like film and music then addressing real-life issues is something that they will have to do. Under the present circumstances, though, the ability of games to make that leap hangs in the balance.

Politics & Games

Is this the Digital Jihad?

Politicised gaming isn't just the preserve of Western gamers

It's not just Western pressure groups and political parties who have been exploiting the potential of games as vehicles for political messages in recent years.

Back in February this year, Lebanese Islamic group Hezbollah issued its first game, *Special Force*, an FPS where you join the Islamic resistance movement to try and expel Israeli troops from south Lebanon.

True to life

"The idea came from a young boy who was playing a war game in an Internet café and wished he could play an Islamic resistance freedom fighter," explains Haj Fouad, editor of Hezbollah's Central Internet Bureau.

"The game represents two real incidents that took place in south Lebanon during Israeli occupation. The aim of the game is to educate the young generation to the thought of fighting against occupation to free man and land."

Special Force was preceded by Afkar Media's *Under Ash*, which casts the player as a Palestinian fighting Israelis in levels based on real-life events between 1989 and 1994.

Sequel expected

Radwan Kasmiya, chief executive of Afkar Media, says using games this way is logical: "I believe all media tools like television, movies, books and even commercials are already involved in getting political messages across and what should make games different?"

Afkar Media claims the game has sold in excess of 50,000 copies in the Middle East and a sequel, which explores the reasons behind suicide bombing, is in the pipeline.



Special Force **lets players assume the role of an Islamic freedom fighter in southern Lebanon**

Bite-size

The art of gaming activism

If you visited the recent Game On exhibition you probably would have seen *Alien Invasion: The New Wave* – a reworking of *Space Invaders* designed to challenge attitudes to immigration and racial prejudice. Created by artist Tony Ward, the game casts the player as a little Englander hurling racial abuse at waves of immigrant 'aliens'.

"I was interested in using games as a platform to discuss political issues, and the metaphor in *Space Invaders* of stopping aliens from landing fitted into that," explains Ward. "It opens up a different way of dealing with issues."

However, Ward sees the Game On organisers' decision to limit the game's sound effects to headphones due to its racial content as censorship. "It is a confrontational game and without people being able to hear that abuse it does lose its impact," he said.

Delivering the message



Tristan Donovan
near Bournemouth

Some games have been bringing politics into play for years, tackling a range of issues:

B1 Nuclear Bomber (1981, PC) A terrible text-only flight sim where you drop a nuke on a Soviet city. But thanks to the game's 'no-one wins at nuclear war' stance even succeeding in your mission results in your character's death from radiation poisoning.

Hampstead (1984, Spectrum) - Set in the bleakness of recession-hit, early Eighties London, this text adventure pushed the player to climb the social ladder from council flat hell to Hampstead snobbery, encountering everything from dole queues (although they are faster in the game than in reality, thankfully) to the old school-tie network along the way,

Narc (1988, Arcade) - Don't do drugs, kids, or the drug squad's gonna blow you apart with an impossibly big rocket launcher. *Defender* and *Robotron* creator Eugene Jarvis' less subtle equivalent of *Grange Hill*'s *Just Say No* record.

Floor 13 (1991, Amiga/PC) - Drawn in moody monochrome, David Eastman's *Floor 13* put the player in an officially non-existent British secret service agency charged with silencing government opposition by any means possible. Packed with barely disguised references to real British political scandals like the Westland Helicopters affair.

Metal Gear Solid (1998, PlayStation) - Hideo Kojima's stealth classic contained a strong anti-war and anti-nuclear weapon message within its cinematic plot.

Deus Ex (2000, PC) - Beneath its off-the-shelf conspiracy theories and *Blade Runner* nods, *Deus Ex* is literally overflowing with politics from digs at public sector tendering to lengthy texts on the conflict over Kashmir and green issues.

State of Emergency (2002, PlayStation 2) - Rockstar takes the anti-globalisation protests of recent years, tears out the politics and shoves the remains into the tedium and pointless violence that is *State Of Emergency*.

Political Point scoring

While games may increasingly be targeting politicians, the boot is often on the other foot with politicians regularly attacking games.

Most recently, culture minister Kim Howells, slammed the "heartlessness" of violent games.

Of course, Howells isn't alone, with fellow British politicians like Tory peer Lord Campbell and Labour MP George Foulkes lashing out at *Grand Theft Auto* and *Space Invaders* respectively.

ELSPA chief executive Roger Bennett thinks that political point-scoring is the reason for these attacks. "As with anything new and youth-orientated, those with political influence will inevitably use videogames as a whipping boy as they don't understand," he says. "But it's no good lambasting them – we need to educate them about games."

Back to school, then.

Bite-size

War games

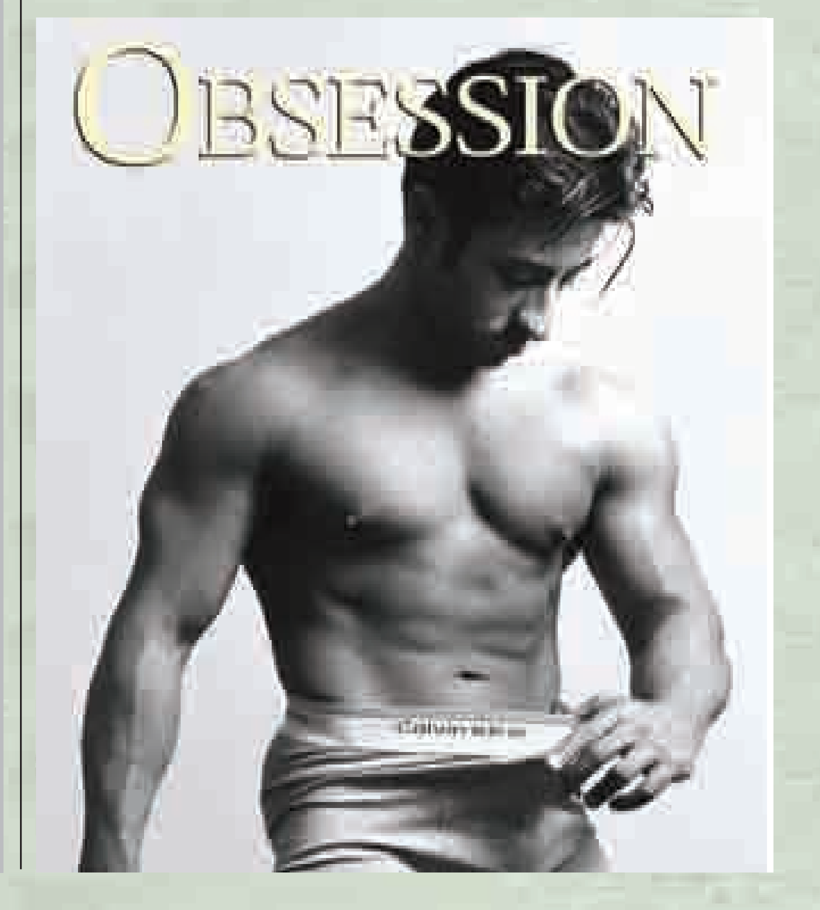
Sales of Gulf War-themed game *Conflict: Desert Storm* rocketed by 13 per cent in the week that British and US troops invaded Iraq.

Anti-war protest

German censors have criticised *Command & Conquer: Generals* for its 'portrayal of war as the only option'.

Games gagged

A US court has ruled that videogames, unlike films and books, are not entitled to constitutionally protected freedom of speech.





Time to put the pedal to the metal… **Out Run Arcade [SEGA] 1986**


0
LAP
0'00"46
ART
STAGE 1

R-TYPE FINAL



"WHEN I WORKED ON R-TYPE FINAL, I AIMED FOR THE FIRST R-TYPE GAME. I ADMIRE ITS IMPACT AND DECISIVENESS"

KUJYO KAZUMA, PRODUCER, R-TYPE FINAL

■ The mid-level boss of the first stage. Fairly solid it was too…

■ The regular power-ups make a welcome reappearance.

■ The bosses are true to *R-Type* form, if a little icky.





DEVELOPER PROFILE

■ Really only renowned for its *R-Type* franchise, IREM's recent and innovative outing into the survival horror genre (with *Zettai Zettsumei Toshi*) surprised many and got the company noticed again. It is also worth mentioning that IREM now also creates many Pachinko (Japanese fruit machine) games for the PlayStation2.

HISTORY

- **Zettai Zetsumei Toshi** 2002 [PlayStation2]
- **R-Type Delta** 1997 [PSone]
- **R-Type** 1987 [Arcade]

THE ULTIMATE SWAN SONG FOR A LEGENDARY SHOOT-'EM-UP?

DETAILS

FORMAT: PlayStation2
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: IREM
DEVELOPER: In-house
RELEASE: June
GENRE: Shoot-'em-up
PLAYERS: 1

■ IREM bring *R-Type* back for one last blast around the block, but will this be a fitting end to a mighty franchise?

Back in the day, all that an R-9 pilot had to do was 'blast off and strike the evil Bydo Empire'. Now things are far more complicated. It's been sixteen years since the original *R-Type* hit the Japanese arcades and wowed punters. With ingenious level design and an incredibly versatile power-up system, the game was the definitive shoot-'em-up. Yet this extraordinary series' days are numbered. With the arcade game industry in a global slump, it is hardly surprising that IREM wishes to lay this exemplary title to rest.

R-Type Final has caused quite a stir among gamers in the know, so to have IREM turn around and say that this will be the last game in the *R-Type* series has raised a few eyebrows. With up to 60 available ships in the finished version, the game is being aimed at long-time fans of the series. It will also be interesting to see how the *R-Type Final* team will cope with balance within the game's levels. After all, what may work for the R-9A may not work for the R-11B (the latter being from *Armed Police Unit Gallop*, but you already knew that). After all, the R-11B historically lacked any Force power-up, limiting its defensive protection. Not to mention that it's unclear whether all these ships will be available from the start or unlockable through meeting in-game criteria (the latter being the most likely, considering the history of the franchise).

Regardless of this, the proposed scope of the game is commendably epic and suitably fitting for the final incarnation of such a respected series. Development is in its early stages and the version we saw had only one playable level and just three selectable ships (the R-9A Arrow-Head, R-9D Shooting Star and R-9F Andromalius), the R-9D being the best of the three, having the most potent and visually impressive of the charged Wave Beam animations. The game is still very much unfinished, and the intricate level design that made the series so famous was noticeably absent. The only playable level felt particularly barren and not all that reminiscent of the older games. After all, what would *R-Type* be without Bydo scum swarming everywhere?

Thankfully, the title remains graphically solid, as the numerous boss encounters proved. However, the in-game design work was a little bland, this being especially noticeable after the vibrantly textured and tangibly modelled *R-Type Delta*. The emptiness of the only playable level merely helped to accentuate this.

But it's early days yet and the code played, while initially unimpressive, does show promise. It is important to mention, however, that the *R-Type Final* team would be wise to note that the level design is what made *R-Type* famous and not a huge array of selectable ships. Admittedly unavailable for play in the trial version, the final game is expected to have an AI Versus mode. How this will be implemented remains to be seen, but the idea of going head to head against another R-9 has certainly whetted our appetites.

We're cautiously optimistic for what may become of *R-Type Final* but IREM has a good history of knocking out very solid shooters, as *R-Type Delta* recently proved. Let's hope that it can live up to that.

> "THE R-TYPE FINAL TEAM SHOULD NOTE THAT THE LEVEL DESIGN IS WHAT MADE R-TYPE FAMOUS AND NOT A HUGE ARRAY OF SHIPS"

USING THE FORCE…

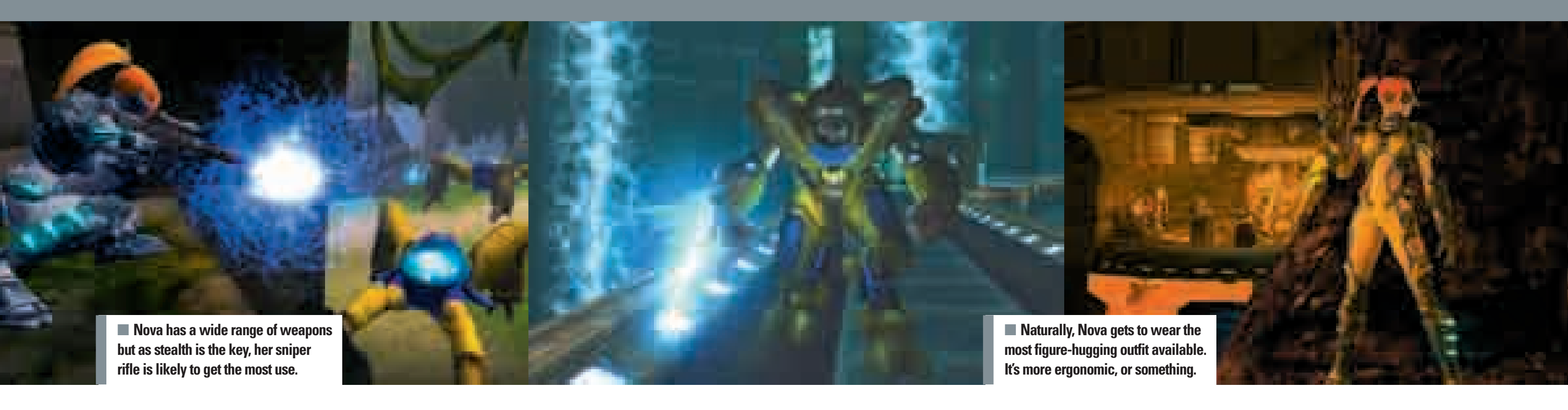
The Force power-up system is probably the most iconic aspect of the *R-Type* series. Each of the three ships in the trial version had their own distinctive Force power-up. Ranging from the Standard Force of the R-9A, which we all know and love, to the more eclectic Shadow Force which was awfully reminiscent, in terms of its limited homing capability, to that of the R-X's Tentacle Force from *R-Type Delta*. That's not all, either. The charged Wave Beam also varied from ship to ship, not only in terms of power but also in terms of functionality. You can also customise your ship's colour now, along with its canopy, as well as being able to select your missile and Bits load out.



■ AI Versus looks promising, but it was unplayable when we saw it.

■ Various types of Bits can be selected for each ship.

STARCRAFT: GHOST



Nova has a wide range of weapons but as stealth is the key, her sniper rifle is likely to get the most use.

Naturally, Nova gets to wear the most figure-hugging outfit available. It's more ergonomic, or something.

THERE'S SOMETHING STRANGE IN THE STARCRAFT NEIGHBOURHOOD – WHO YA GONNA CALL?

Mention the development company Blizzard Entertainment to anyone who knows their stuff about PC gaming and you'll immediately conjure up images of legions of orcs, aliens and other monstrosities marching across an isometric landscape, intent on ripping each other to shreds, thanks to the firm's previous successes with the *Warcraft* and *Starcraft* RTS franchises. But it's a trend that the California-based company is attempting to break with the development of *Starcraft: Ghost* – a title that takes all the familiar traits of the *Starcraft* universe (races, planets and all) and throws them headlong into a hectic third-person action adventure.

For all of you who are suddenly gasping with outrage and preparing your accusations of heresy though, it's not as bad as you might think; in fact, *Starcraft: Ghost* looks pretty smart, if only for the fact that it uses so many good ideas that have been done before. Not surprisingly, these ideas have been picked from some of the better examples (or not, depending on your opinion) of platform adventuring.

Tomb Raider? Check – with the lead protagonist being a rather nimble lady by the name of Nova, there's no doubting that her platform-jumping, gun-firing antics will earn at least a few comparisons. *MDK*? Check again – although Nova has more than a few surprises up her sleeve, her main weapon happens to be an extremely high-powered sniper rifle with a telescopic lens, just like everyone's favourite janitor, Kurt Hectic. *Hitman 2*? Oh, hell yes, check – with multiple pathways open in every level, you'll be able to choose exactly how you attempt each mission (quiet and stealthy, all guns blazing or overly acrobatic; the choice, as they say, is yours), with the harder routes offering better rewards.

In keeping with current trends, stealth is the biggest feature here – after all, it's not called *Ghost* for nothing – which goes some way to explaining Nova's cloaking ability. Naturally, you can only activate it in short bursts but used at the right time (in conjunction with the *Splinter Cell*-esque Visibility Meter – yes, another borrowed idea), it can mean the difference between an easy ride and an all-out firefight.

Having seen the current build of the game in action, we can see why some might believe that *Starcraft: Ghost* will be a good first step for Blizzard into the world of console-based gaming. Of course, it remains to be seen whether the slow-paced shackles of RTS gaming can be left behind in a genre that can easily become all too bland, all too quickly…

> "BY COMBINING TRIED-AND-TESTED GAMEPLAY WITH A WELL-RESPECTED FRANCHISE, BLIZZARD CERTAINLY HAS ITS HEAD SCREWED ON RIGHT"

DETAILS

FORMAT: PS2/Xbox/GameCube
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Vivendi Universal
DEVELOPER: Blizzard Entertainment
RELEASE: Q4 '03
GENRE: Action/Adventure
PLAYERS: 1

Forget its RTS roots – the latest *Starcraft* game goes for a third-person action/adventure angle in an effort to bring something new to the table(top).



The bigger they are, the harder they fall – although obviously, you don't want this one to fall on top of you once you manage to take it out.


eMag

TRUE CRIME: STREETS OF L.A.



Shoot-out segments are typically full of action – Kang's weapons have a limitless supply of ammo, meaning you'll never find yourself short of a gun.

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

DIGGING THE DIRT IN L.A.'S BACKSTREETS

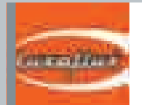
DEAD TO RIGHTS + GTA3 x LOS ANGELES = TRUE CRIME

"IT ALLOWS PLAYERS TO ENJOY THE CAR STUNTS, CLOSE CALLS AND ACTION THAT ARE SYNONYMOUS WITH HONG KONG ACTION FILMS"

LARRY GOLDBERG, VICE-PRESIDENT, ACTIVISION

The more fighting techniques you learn, the better you'll be at dealing with a crowd of goons.

Thanks to the likes of GPS satellite photos, the streets of L.A. in the game are as realistic and lifelike as you could ever want them to be.



COMPANY PROFILE

■ *True Crime* is a complete change of direction for Luxoflux Corp, as all the games created in the company's relatively short life have focused on car-based carnage. Despite only *Vigilante 8* being the most memorable of them, it was enough to make Activision acquire the firm in October 2002.

HISTORY

■ **STAR WARS: DEMOLITION** 2000 [Multi]
■ **VIGILANTE 8: 2ND OFFENCE** 1999 [Multi]
■ **VIGILANTE 8** 1998 [Multi]

EVERY CITY HAS A DARK SIDE – ESPECIALLY THE CITY OF ANGELS…

PS2 **So, *True Crime: Streets Of L.A.* is the game that's going to knock Rockstar off the perch that *GTA* built, is it?** Activision's PR people would have us believe it, and anyone who only takes a five second glimpse at these screenshots will probably think this is a fairly faithful *GTA*-esque romp. Thankfully though, there's much more to *True Crime* than just a half-hearted rip-off of the *GTA* series. By throwing in a good helping of *The Getaway* and *Dead To Rights* in terms of attention to detail, gunplay and hand-to-hand combat, *True Crime* manages to capture the best of everything. With its massively detailed realistic environment (in this case, a 300-square-mile section of LA spanning from the northern reaches of Hollywood and Compton in the east to the southern tip of Santa Monica), impressive third-person shooting and fighting sections plus the ability to drive or run anywhere you please, you can't help thinking that *True Crime* is going to be rather good.

Seeing as how Activision has enlisted the vocal talents of Gary Oldman, Michael Madsen, Ron Perlman and Christopher Walken (plus many more), the story is paramount in *True Crime*. Taking control of Nick Kang, an ex-LAPD officer who's recruited to a secret task force after being kicked off the force for violent conduct, it's your job to bring down the up-and-coming Triad and Russian Mafia crime outfits by any means possible. This is done through a large number of missions, sub-missions and side-plots that offer a wide variety of gameplay experiences; from chasing criminals and infiltrating enemy hideouts to learning new fighting techniques in your brother's dojo and even having a full-on shoot-out in a nightclub, there's plenty to be found here.

> "FORGET THE SIMPLICITY OF GTA'S STORYLINE – TRUE CRIME IS AS DEEP AND MEANINGFUL AS ANY EXCITING HOLLYWOOD BLOCKBUSTER"

Of course, it's this distinctly mission-based structure, whether it be one with multiple pathways or not, that could be *True Crime*'s undoing. From what we've seen, each set goal could mean that the rest of the game only pays lip service to the freedom of movement and ability to do what you please that Activision has been promising. Combine this with the fact that you play a cop, not even a slightly shady one (patting down people on the sidewalk rather than caving their heads in with a baseball bat), and the appeal is already gone for those who prefer the shallowness of *GTA*'s pretext for violence.

Regardless of the possible negatives though, Activision's trump card is one that guarantees success no matter how good the game ends up being – *True Crime* already looks like the game of choice on Xbox and GameCube for people hoping to experience something similar to *GTA3*, while also being a more than worthy adversary to Rockstar's efforts on the PS2. In fact, *True Crime* could end up kicking Rockstar up the backside in readiness for the next instalment of *GTA*. *Vice City* might have been good, but the fact that it didn't feel half as finished as the last one is something that could be highlighted if *True Crime* manages to show us all how it's supposed to be done. It's just up to Activision to keep its promises now – having given Luxoflux an additional nine months to make this really shine, we just hope that the game turns out to be everything we're expecting.

DETAILS

FORMAT: PS2/Xbox/GameCube
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Activision
DEVELOPER: Luxoflux
RELEASE: September '03
GENRE: Action/Adventure
PLAYERS: 1

■ A dark, gritty action game that uses more than its fair share of ideas from *GTA3* and *Dead To Rights* to come up with something a bit tasty.

PICK A FATE, ANY FATE

The unique thing about *True Crime* is the myriad continually branching possibilities that emerge. Kill someone you're meant to be tailing and you might never discover where he was heading; don't kill someone when you have the chance and they could get you later on. It's not a case of failing a mission and then simply starting again as if it never happened (à la *GTA*); instead, the story changes accordingly and carries straight on. Oh, for a bit of hindsight…



■ You won't be able to use any newly-learned skills until you defeat the obligatory dojo master.

■ Real-time car damage physics means you'll be pinching new vehicles on a regular basis.

JAK II: RENEGADE

LIFE AFTER CRASH DOESN'T SEEM TO BE GETTING THE NAUGHTY DOG CREW DOWN

The platform game is a dying breed. Looking at recent efforts, not one has truly stood out. We're all too often subjected to poor clones of *Mario 64* or overcomplicated adventures that only scrape by as platformers on the grounds that they have a jump button. Even Mario himself doesn't sell in the same numbers he's used to – a sign of a dying genre or is the old plumber just not cutting it? But we digress… The main thing to note is that the traditional platform game seems to be a thing of the past. These days, elements of other genres are often mixed in to create a new play experience – the danger here is that the core gameplay is often convoluted by the additional elements rather than enhanced. Of course, this isn't always the case…

Considering *Jak II: Renegade* is such an important title for Sony, it'll come as no shock to hear that a wealth of new features have been thrown Jak's way to keep the action as fresh as can be. For starters, part of the game's back-story sees Jak imprisoned and used as a guinea pig for an evil substance known as Dark Eco. As a side effect, this bestows him with some rather useful special abilities with which to hunt down his captors and wreak some explosive vengeance. On top of that, every vehicle littered around the bustling towns can be liberated for your own good. Yes, the hero steals things – this should prove interesting, even if it does smack of *Grand Theft Auto* (*Vice City* is one of the games developer Jason Rubin admits to having played at length recently). Furthermore, several weapons can be found and used on your lengthy quest and the heavy emphasis on item collection from the first game is gone. Those collectables will still fill the landscapes but they're now totally optional – definitely a turn for the better.

Nobody could accuse the first game of slacking off visually but by upping polygon counts across all the models and throwing in countless new effects, those clever people at Naughty Dog are making the PS2 work harder than ever. It's well known that the team for the first game included artists and animators from some of the world's best animation studios, and this big-budget sequel will undoubtedly have a team of similar stature. Judging by what we've seen, the same high artistic standards have been applied here. It's plain to see that we're dealing with a team that knows its way around the PS2, a fact hammered home by the rolling landscapes, detailed characters and impressive lighting on show in the version we played.

So far, we can see no grounds for concern. Practically every criticism of the first game has already been addressed at this early stage, giving the development team a fair bit of time to polish up the rest of the game. Combining elements from *Jak and Daxter*, *Ratchet & Clank* and even the *Grand Theft Auto* series, *Jak II: Renegade* is an ambitious title and no mistake. A lot will depend not on how well these varied features work individually but how well they gel into a single experience. Initial impressions are highly favourable – given the reputation of the Naughty Dog team, this is hardly surprising – but it won't be until we're given free run on a finished (or near-finished) game that we can draw a proper conclusion. That's another one to ask Santa for, then…

DETAILS

FORMAT: PS2
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: SCEE
DEVELOPER: Naughty Dog
RELEASE: TBC
GENRE: Platform/Adventure
PLAYERS: 1

■ PS2 platform games are rarer than you think, so this sequel to one of the best should turn a few heads…

WHERE'S DAXTER?

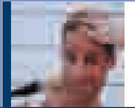
While the orange furry sidekick may have had his name dropped from the title, he still plays a major part in the game. Wisecracking and insulting as ever, Daxter follows our hero around and does his thing – okay, so his thing is a stylish form of nothing, but you'd miss him if he wasn't there. We've been told that later parts of the game will see Daxter shift from lovable sidekick to main playable character – it'll be interesting to see how his sections play out and whether he'll be able to make use of the new elements such as vehicles or weaponry. All will be revealed soon enough and we can't wait to see how the little guy fares when the spotlight is turned on him…

"THE HEAVY EMPHASIS ON ITEM COLLECTION FROM THE FIRST GAME IS DEAD AND BURIED"



■ Sporting this winter's model is Jak, showing you can look good while saving the world. Nice shotgun, by the way…

JAK II: RENEGADE
PLAYSTATION2



DEVELOPER PROFILE

■ Jason Rubin has been a part of Naughty Dog since its humble beginnings when he and Andy Gavin both programmed Apple II games under the name Jam Software in 1986. After several titles that failed to set the world alight, *Crash Bandicoot* was released. The series has now shipped over 25 million units worldwide.

HISTORY

■ **CRASH BANDICOOT** 1996 [PlayStation]
■ **WAY OF THE WARRIOR** 1994 [3DO]
■ **SKI CRAZED** 1986 [Apple II]

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

MAKING A NAUGHTY SEQUEL

JAK AND DAXTER - COLLECTING x RATCHET & CLANK = JAK II: RENEGADE

"JAK IS MOTIVATED BY REVENGE… HE SEEKS VENGEANCE. THAT'S A BIG DEPARTURE FROM MOST PLATFORMERS"

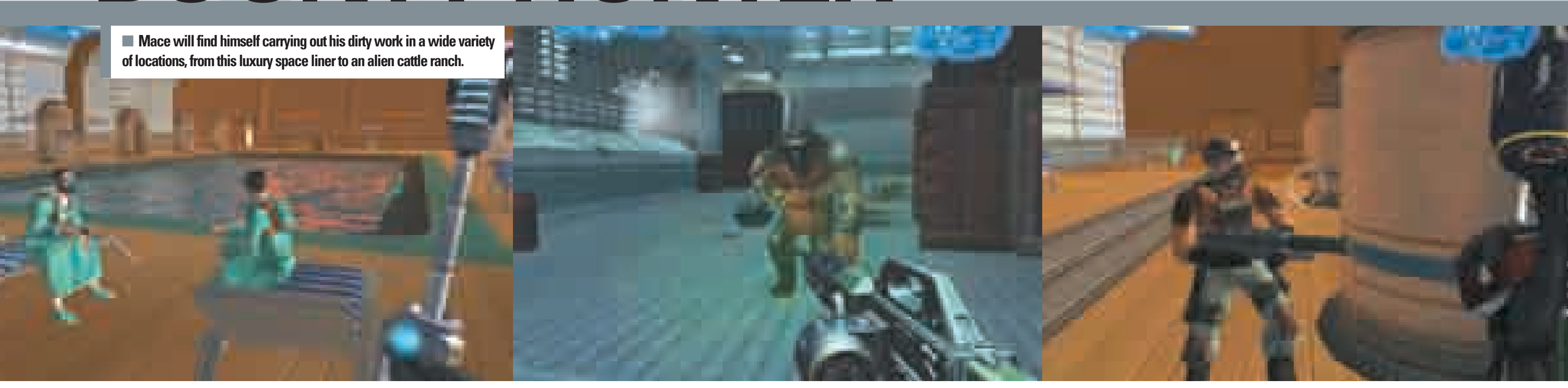
JASON RUBIN, PRESIDENT, NAUGHTY DOG

■ In a very interesting twist, you'll be able to make use of any vehicles you find on your travels. *Grand Theft* who?

■ Jak doesn't look too well. That Dark Eco may have given him special powers but it does nothing for his complexion.

■ Outnumbered but never outgunned, not now he's armed to the teeth, at least.

MACE GRIFFIN: BOUNTY HUNTER



Mace will find himself carrying out his dirty work in a wide variety of locations, from this luxury space liner to an alien cattle ranch.

AFTER TEN YEARS INSIDE, THE TOUGHEST GUNSLINGER IN THE GALAXY IS HUNGRY FOR THE SWEET TASTE OF REVENGE

There is a long history of titles that have tried to incorporate two or more distinct gaming genres under one roof, yet only rarely are we allowed to seamlessly shift between these elements without a break in play. Switching effortlessly from an on-foot combat sequence into a high-speed car chase in such games as *GTA: Vice City* is a liberating experience, and one that Warthog is hoping to achieve on a grander scale with the interstellar adventures of Mace Griffin.

"The main focal point for the game has always been the transition from space to ground and vice versa," explains Zuby Ahmed, senior designer at Warthog. "When we sat down at the end of '99 we looked at the *Starlancer* engine and thought the game itself was great, but wouldn't it be cool if you could get out of the spaceship, hunt someone down on the ground, take off in your ship again and fly to a new area to do the same thing. It was then we started developing what is now known as the Hulk engine."

Blending massive-scale space combat into a high quality ground-based shooter within the one gaming environment is quite a feat, as Ahmed reveals: "The game takes place within a huge 3D sphere which might include the whole space environment and maybe a space-station, then within that space-station you've got each different room section. So there's a vast amount of data that has to be dealt with by the engine, coupled with issues like AI, animation data and lighting effects."

Throughout the game, players will view the action through the eyes of Mace, whether seeing his hands on the ship's controls or clutching the impressively detailed array of weaponry. The idea is to completely immerse us in proceedings by following Mace everywhere rather than simply carrying out a string of detached missions. "At the very start of the game you're released from prison and, rather than getting kitted out for the first mission using a point and click interface, you actually walk around the space-station, interact with various NPCs to find out where you're supposed to go, acquire a ship, acquire some weapons, then go out on your first job," says Ahmed. "All of this you perform yourself, instead of just selecting from menus which takes the whole immersion factor away from you."

But merging on-foot and in-flight elements visually was only part of the challenge, as Ahmed explains: "One of the main parts of the seamless transition is that instead of learning a different control type for each section you're using basically the same control, which enables players to blend ground and space-based sections into one another without any problems". And since the game is predominantly an FPS (around 75 per cent of the balance), space combat controls were refined to reflect a more FPS style of play, so as not to deter the average shooter fan. "I think they'll pick it up like a duck to water," says Ahmed. "They should get a real buzz out of being able to battle their way through a hangar, then quickly jump into the cockpit and just take off without having to figure out a new control set-up; just obviously taking into account a more 360-degree arena without the walls or ceilings."

Whether or not this ambitious hybrid gaming concept will deliver the wholesome feel Warthog is hoping for is likely to come down to how smoothly the space and ground sequences are fused. It's looking very promising…

"MIXING SPACE COMBAT AND GROUND-BASED SHOOTING IN ONE ENVIRONMENT IS QUITE A FEAT"

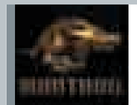
DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox, PS2, GameCube, PC
ORIGIN: UK
PUBLISHER: Vivendi Universal
DEVELOPER: Warthog
RELEASE: July '03
GENRE: First-Person Adventure/Shooter
PLAYERS: 1

Follow Mace's adventures in the pilot's seat, on the ground and through awesome set pieces.

CLEVER CANNON FODDER

The variety of adversaries we can expect to see on Mace's ground-based travels, and the advanced AI that has been attributed to each enemy type, should raise a few impressed eyebrows according to Warthog's Zuby Ahmed: "We've got AI profiles for each of the characters and, depending on the parameters we've set for that type of NPC, they'll react completely differently to various situations." Based on an action-reaction system, the behaviour of NPCs will depend on their programmed intelligence, bravery, health status and even the weaponry involved. "An NPC will judge the weapon you're carrying against the weapon they have and react in their best interests," says Ahmed.



COMPANY PROFILE

■ A team of former Electronic Arts employees got together to found Warthog in 1997, and enjoyed massive acclaim following the success of early project *Starlancer*. The studio is looking forward to an exciting year in 2003 with the release of its latest multiformat title, *Mace Griffin: Bounty Hunter*.

HISTORY

- **MACE GRIFFIN: BOUNTY HUNTER** 2003 [Multi]
- **STAR TREK: INVASION** 2000 [PSone]
- **STARLANCER** 2000 [PC, Dreamcast]

■ As Mace can walk straight onto a ship and sit down in the cockpit, everything in the game had to be designed strictly to a relative scale.

■ A Bounty Hunter should be able to handle himself in a firefight whether it be on the ground or behind the controls of a spacecraft.

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

PERFECT BLEND OF FIRST-PERSON ACTION

STARLANCER + HALO x SMOOTHLY BLENDED = MACE GRIFFIN

"WE WANTED TO CREATE ONE SEAMLESS GAMING EXPERIENCE AND ARE HAPPY WITH WHAT WE'VE ACHIEVED"

ZUBY AHMED, SENIOR DESIGNER, WARTHOG

■ Textures in the game look great, and the dynamic lighting can be seen reflecting off your detailed weaponry as you walk along.

UNLIMITED SAGA



■ The hand-drawn artwork is gloriously realised in-game, giving the title a wonderfully unique style.

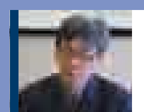
■ Similar to rolling a dice, this roulette wheel decides what level of attack is performed.

■ Stopping off in town between quests is a great way to pick up new party members or stock up on items.

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

RPGS – KNOW YOUR LIMITS

FINAL FANTASY + TABLETOP RPGS - 4 D10 +3 = UNLIMITED SAGA



DEVELOPER PROFILE

■ With 18 years service at Square, Akitoshi Kawazu has quite a history. Starting with his involvement with the very first *Final Fantasy* games, Kawazu-san earned his stripes working on much of Square's respectable catalogue and now heads up development of the *SaGa* games, Square's second most successful RPG series.

HISTORY

- **RACING LAGOON** 1999 [PlayStation]
- **FINAL FANTASY LEGEND** 1989 [Game Boy]
- **FINAL FANTASY** 1987 [NES]

AND WE THOUGHT DARK CLOUD 2 WAS COMPLICATED…

PS2 **Considering it's Square's second-place performer at retail, the *SaGa* series has never really caused a stir outside Japan.** The second *SaGa Frontier* game was the only one to be granted a PAL release and it wasn't great. Hampered by a questionable translation and an utter lack of recognition, *SaGa Frontier 2* quickly slipped into obscurity. The game was an interesting choice for the PAL market, especially when the likes of *Threads Of Fate*, *Chrono Cross* and *Final Fantasy Tactics* failed to reach these shores. But now *Unlimited SaGa* looks set to make amends for past misgivings. How? By vying for the title of World's Most Complicated RPG, that's how, and it intends to look good doing it.

As with most epics to slip out of the Square Enix stable, *Unlimited SaGa* is absolutely beautiful. The only area that left us a little cold was the animation; while far from awful, the incredible sprites don't move nearly as smoothly as it seems they should. The artistic style is remarkable and unique, with in-game two-dimensional goodness giving way to cut-scenes that have been rendered using Adobe's brand new Sketch Motion technology (it's the new cel-shading, trend chasers), giving the game an incredibly vivid cartoon style. Judging by the results of the maiden voyage of this technique, we'd say it certainly won't be the last – if it turns out to be as versatile as it is impressive then the 2D/3D style could spread like wildfire.

If you're tempted buy one of the other half-decent RPGs the PS2 can offer right now, you might want to think about saving your cash for a while. With seven unique playable characters leading to seven utterly different stories and quests, *Unlimited SaGa* would be a remarkably extensive title even if each of these only lasted ten hours. If only. Wave goodbye to your friends and leave the phone off the hook for the next six months because the developers talk of 40-plus hours of gameplay per scenario. This may sound a little far-fetched but it's thoroughly possible – the simplistic nature of dungeons and towns means that these can easily be made as enormous and numerous as the game requires. Whatever the outcome, you're looking at quite a commitment if you want to see everything *SaGa* holds, and it's not going to be easy. Square Enix proclaims this to be one of the most hard-core games it has developed.

It may not be greeted by the queues that a new *Final Fantasy* gets, or be treated to sales chart stardom, but then nobody expects it to, least of all the game's developers. As hard-core an RPG as Square Enix has ever put out, *Unlimited SaGa* will never win the vote of the apathetic *FIFA* generation, but as long as there are gamers out there who demand more for their money it'll undoubtedly find its niche. The bad news is that the localisation only stretches to text and voice acting, meaning those evil black borders will be present in the PAL version. Still, a letterboxed game is preferable to no game at all – Europe has been robbed of many of Square and Enix's finest titles for years and we'll reluctantly befriend the imposing black borders this time.

Come *Final Fantasy X-2* and *Dragon Quest VIII*, though, there's going to be a world of whinging if we aren't exploiting every inch of our unnecessarily large televisions…

DETAILS

FORMAT: PS2
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Infogrames
DEVELOPER: Square Enix
RELEASE: TBC (Japan: Out now)
GENRE: RPG
PLAYERS: 1

■ The *SaGa* series moves onwards and upwards in what will be Square Enix's first European release since the merger

THE DUNGEON MASTER'S GUIDE

If you're looking for a parallel to draw with *Unlimited SaGa*, think of tabletop RPGs rather than the digital adventures that frequent our consoles. Dungeon design and exploration are simplistic but the real complexities arise from the character development and battle systems, both of which look likely to cut us off from the outside world indefinitely. The roulette wheels in battle add an element of chance that equates to the deciding dice rolls of many a tabletop game and the level of freedom to do as you wish in the quests is just as faithful. These similarities may not be particularly new but in terms of console games, this kind of thing is rare.

"SQUARE ENIX PROCLAIMS THIS TO BE ONE OF THE MOST HARD-CORE GAMES IT HAS DEVELOPED"



■ The battle system is as open-ended as it is ingenious, lending itself to many different approaches.

MIDTOWN MADNESS 3



All that free road and they choose to drive on our bit? With the garbage truck you can make your own rules of the road.

INNER CITY DRIVING ISN'T ALL ABOUT GRIDLOCKS, YOU KNOW…

DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Microsoft
DEVELOPER: Digital Illusions
RELEASE: Summer '03 (US: June '03)
GENRE: Driving
PLAYERS: 1-8

Tear through Paris and Washington without any regard for the Highway Code or public safety.

"MIDTOWN MADNESS 3 HAS MORE TWISTS ON THE FRANTIC INNER CITY DRIVING THEME THAN YOU CAN SHAKE A GEAR STICK AT"

When it comes to stress relief and the potential for black comedy, few gaming concepts can match a larger-than-life dose of madcap motoring through crowded city streets. Yet aside from the blood-soaked criminal antics of classics such as the *Grand Theft Auto* series, more light-hearted driving romps like *Crazy Taxi* tend to suffer from limited longevity. However, Digital Illusions seems determined to squeeze every last drop of potential lifespan from the latest *Midtown Madness* title by including more twists on the frantic inner city driving theme than you can shake a gear stick at.

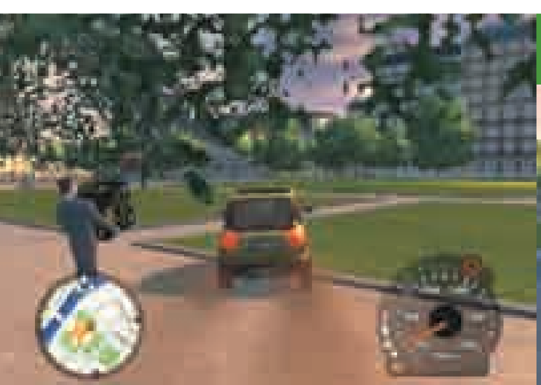
Not only will players find themselves driving taxi missions against the clock, but all manner of other careers behind the wheel await players in the game's Undercover mode. From delivering pizzas to working as a paramedic, the concept of reaching a number of checkpoints in an allotted time is stretched as far as it will go. Together with an array of standard racing modes, mouth-watering multiplayer capabilities and the excitement of staging all the action within real-world city maps, this is a pretty complete package.

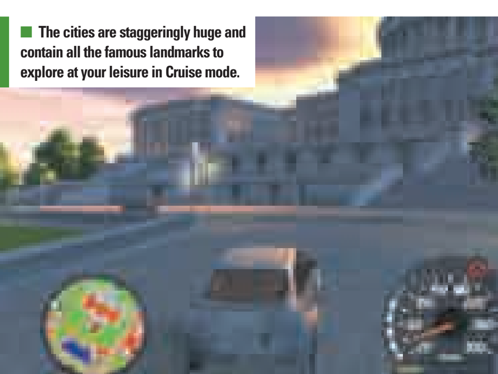
Paris and Washington DC may not have been recreated with the accuracy of *The Getaway*'s London, but the streets are alive with atmosphere and all the famous landmarks can be visited freely. Paris in particular is awash with character – its quaint cafés clutter the narrow side streets with furniture ready to be sent sprawling as you hurtle through. Just about every piece of scenery is interactive and can be brushed aside like a film set, rather than bringing your vehicle to a more realistic halt. In fact, one of the game's most gratifying elements comes from ploughing into flimsy market stalls or careering through litter bins.

Alas, a jack-of-all-trades usually ends up being a master of none and we've already seen most of the features in *Midtown Madness 3* done better elsewhere. That said, we did have a huge amount of fun playing the preview code and reckon its variety of gameplay scenarios, attention to detail, and online gaming potential might just be enough to make this game very popular indeed.



Things get particularly entertaining when you're forced to stray from the road and into the superb selection of interactive scenery.





The cities are staggeringly huge and contain all the famous landmarks to explore at your leisure in Cruise mode.


eMag

CONFLICT: DESERT STORM 2

IS PIVOTAL'S MILITARY SUCCESSOR READY FOR CONSOLE WAR?

To anyone who hasn't been living under a rock for the past six months, the concept of a squad-based military title set in Iraq may seem in slightly poor taste. But let us be the first to leap to the defence of *Conflict: Desert Storm 2* – not only is the game based on the original Gulf War rather than the rematch, but development on the title started last year, long before hostilities began and even before the first title had hit the shelves. The developers themselves realise the unfortunate nature of the circumstances but are tackling the issue with a respectable degree of sensitivity. "We took out anything that could have caused offence," Pivotal's Alex McLean reassured us after explaining that the game was too far into development to make any changes once war broke out.

Graphically, this is already showing marked improvements over the original game. Most noticeably, the deep fogging that plagued some areas of the first game has been eliminated by calculating the optimum draw distances and creating levels with this in mind. Character models are noticeably smoother too, boasting bump mapping and improved texturing for a more realistic appearance. This is true both of your squad and the enemies, who are now a lot more varied than before in terms of size and appearance. Also impressive is the damage done by some of the game's more heavy-duty firepower, as air strikes and mortar fire can blow craters in streets and destroy buildings to help or hinder your progress through the missions.

Perhaps more impressive still is the artificial intelligence of your enemies. Using true line of sight technology, *C:DS2* has clever routines whereby enemy soldiers will search your last known locations, perform structured sweeps and aid their comrades. It's smart stuff, but don't worry about it making the game unfair; the AI of your comrades has been improved as well, meaning they'll lay down cover fire, use grenades where appropriate and even guard areas or people nearby.

A notable difference from the last game comes by way of the troopers you'll use. The foursome will be constant throughout and if just one should die, there'll be a Game Over screen with your name on it (not literally, unless your name really is Game Over, you poor sod). Thankfully, death doesn't come quickly and when a man goes down, you'll have a limited time to reach him and administer medical aid. This constant quartet means the scripting can develop stronger ties between the soldiers, allowing the player to better identify with their gun-toting heroes.

Promising real weapons and locations, 14 epic missions and a deep scripted narrative, we're already impressed with what little we've seen of *Conflict 2*. Improving on its predecessor in every way, the only question mark still hanging over the title concerns online play (see 'Four's Company'). Pivotal does seem to be one of the few developers that listens to and acts upon criticism of its titles and the results speak for themselves – the company is going from strength to strength. We can't wait to be let loose with a more finished build later in the year – *Conflict: Desert Storm 2* may just be the definitive console war game…

DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox, GC, PS2, PC
ORIGIN: UK
PUBLISHER: SCi
DEVELOPER: Pivotal Games
RELEASE: Q3 '03
GENRE: Strategy/Action
PLAYERS: 1-4

Having listened to criticisms of the first game, Pivotal have stepped the *Conflict* franchise up a gear for this already superior sequel.

FOUR'S COMPANY

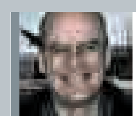
One of the unique features of *C:DS2* is the co-operative play – the Xbox version allows for up to four soldiers to team up and work together. Unfortunately, this is trimmed down to a more traditional two-player affair for the PS2 and absent entirely from the PC game. Of course, this could be included via online support but this is still the basis of much debate at Pivotal. Their views on networking are simple – do it brilliantly or don't do it at all. It's a commendable view and no mistake, so we can't wait for the *Conflict* franchise to get online at some point.

> "PIVOTAL SEEMS TO BE ONE OF THE FEW DEVELOPERS THAT GENUINELY LISTENS TO AND ACTS UPON CRITICISM OF ITS TITLES"



Set your sniper up in the right position and he'll be able to pick off any wandering enemies. Very handy.

Calling in the services of your airborne comrades is often the best way to deal with a tricky situation.



DIRECTOR PROFILE

Jim Bambra has been at Pivotal since it was founded in 2000 on the back of the demise of Pumpkin Studios. Previously associated with the likes of MicroProse and Eidos, he now heads up the small British-based company that may currently only have one title to its name but is certainly one to watch.

HISTORY

- CONFLICT: DESERT STORM 2 2003 [Multi]
- THE GREAT ESCAPE 2003 [Multi]
- CONFLICT: DESERT STORM 2002 [Multi]

There are plenty of supplies around, so don't be surprised when you stumble across a spare grenade launcher.

Darkness makes for good cover. It's just too bad that towering inferno is lighting the whole place up.

Whose side is that helicopter on? You can hang around and find out, or just hide in a nearby building.

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

DRAFTING ELEMENTS FROM ALL AROUND

CONFLICT: DESERT STORM + SOCOM - HEADSET = CONFLICT: DESERT STORM 2

"CRITICISMS LEVELLED AT THE GAME BASED ON THE EVENTS IN THE MIDDLE EAST ARE INEVITABLE, BUT WE'RE NOT TRYING TO MAKE A POLITICAL STATEMENT"

ALEX MCLEAN, DIRECTOR OF TECHNOLOGY, PIVOTAL GAMES

CASTLEVANIA [WORKING TITLE]



> "AS A 2D GAME, IT WOULD BE DIFFICULT TO INTRODUCE INTO THE MARKET CONSIDERING THE GENERAL BLEAK PERCEPTION OF TWO DIMENSIONAL TITLES"
>
> *KOJI IGARASHI, CASTLEVANIA DIRECTOR, KONAMI JAPAN*

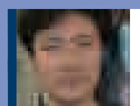
■ The familiar statue, the comforting glow… it looks as though somebody's found a save point.

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

BREATHING NEW LIFE INTO DRACULA

CASTLEVANIA: SOTN x DEVIL MAY CRY - VAGRANT STORY = CASTLEVANIA

■ While the RPG elements may be dropping like flies, purists will be glad to see the damage figures still show just how much hurt you dish out.



DEVELOPER PROFILE

■ Koji Igarashi is the director on this project, but his career with Konami hasn't always been so glamorous. Starting with a part-time job, Igarashi-san moved up the ranks through edutainment and PC reference software before being moved onto the *Castlevania* team during production of *Symphony Of The Night*.

HISTORY

- **CASTLEVANIA: SOTN** 1997 [PSone]
- **TOKI-MEKI MEMORIAL** 1995 [PSone]
- **TWIN BEE** 1992 [PC Engine]

KONAMI'S VAMPIRE REBIRTH HAS BEEN NOTHING BUT A RUMOUR… UNTIL NOW

As shelves fill with countless new attempts at franchises, it's getting ever harder for a new series to be born. This is why many of the more popular gaming series tend to be those that predate this, and often even the last, generation of consoles. Games like *Final Fantasy*, *Zelda* and, of course, Konami's *Castlevania* titles. As one of the most prestigious gaming franchises, there's always an excited buzz around the announcement of a new *Castlevania* title, and with E3 just finishing by the time you read this, we're probably still shaking from having finally played this PS2 outing. After an incredible feat of secrecy, we can finally reveal the new look of the series that's kept the Belmonts and Dracula in the public eye for so long. Put past misgivings behind you (yes, we mean the disappointing N64 titles) and just look forward to what will be…

Within seconds of looking at this page, several major questions should already have been answered. The biggest mystery since this project first came to light has been the graphical style – some sources had claimed it would be sprite based, others predicted a *Contra*-style 2.5D viewpoint, but we can now confirm (thanks to some help from Konami) that the game will be fully 3D. Moving away from the RPG-tinged *Symphony Of The Night* and the GBA trio, Konami's Koji Igarashi explained to us how the new instalment is going back to its roots: "I'm putting more emphasis on the action aspect," he said. "There will be no player level-up element." To expand on this, the character development has not been entirely shunned, rather shifted away from monster slaying and earning experience to certain events and items that enhance abilities.

This move may come as a shock to some gamers, but Igarashi-san does a fine job of defending the decision. "I am not putting my focus on the core audience," he explains, telling us of the awkward situation the series is in. "If we try to appeal solely to regular players, the titles would get more and more complicated. Consequently, these games will be appreciated only by the most hard-core gamers." While some might call this selling out, in an age of high development costs and overheads, it can only really be seen as good business sense.

Despite a change in direction, the team seems determined to maintain the gothic style that watermarks every *Castlevania* title; the art and music still uphold the feel of the series and even smaller elements like familiar sub-weapons should keep fans happy. As if that weren't enough, there are plenty of familiar faces among the cast of enemies – all of which helps carry *Castlevania*'s unique style into what should be the first must-have 3D game in the series.

It's not what a lot of people will expect, nor is it what many have been longing for (demand for a new 2D title is incredible) but it's too early to write off this new *Castlevania* adventure just yet. A brave departure from the recent flow of the series, this adrenaline-pumping update should maintain enough old-school flavour to keep retro fans happy while taking the ageing series in a new direction. We fear change as much as the next *Symphony Of The Night* fan, but we have every faith that Konami can make this a great addition to the series.

DETAILS

FORMAT: PS2
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Konami
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: TBC
GENRE: Adventure
PLAYERS: 1

■ One of the world's best loved series on the world's most popular console – that has to be a recipe for success.

> "THE TEAM SEEMS DETERMINED TO MAINTAIN THE GOTHIC STYLE THAT WATERMARKS EVERY CASTLEVANIA TITLE"

ALUCARD MAY CRY

The latest *Devil May Cry* may have suffered from style over substance, but in terms of the look of the game and its predecessor, few were left cold by the intense gothic architecture and locations. It was often said that if *Castlevania* was to go all 3D on us, the results would be very similar and, strangely, this seems to be the case. From the style to the on-screen combo figures and emphasis on action, parallels with the Dante double bill are not just likely but almost fair. That said, of course *Castlevania* will have its own redeeming features – be it the character development or just the style that has helped make the series so popular. The main thing is that *Castlevania* hasn't lost sight of its roots.



■ Mmm, holy water. It's all fun and games until somebody loses an eye…

■ Some enemies are familiar, although you can bet they'll be looking all spanky and new.

EVIL DEAD: A FISTFUL OF BOOMSTICK



Completing secondary objectives can help to make your life a lot easier in later missions.

INTRODUCE THE UNDEAD TO THE BUSINESS END OF A BOOMSTICK

DETAILS
FORMAT: Xbox, PS2
ORIGIN: UK
PUBLISHER: THQ
DEVELOPER: VIS
RELEASE: June '03
GENRE: Action
PLAYERS: 1

The *Evil Dead* universe makes an ideal home for the *State Of Emergency* mass combat engine, producing a fittingly theatrical slaughter-fest.

It's almost three years since fans of the *Evil Dead* movies were left somewhat disillusioned by an unsuccessful attempt to transfer the magic of the cult horror series onto home consoles. Despite the best efforts of *Evil Dead* star Bruce Campbell to brighten things up with some suitably cheesy one-liners, *Evil Dead: Hail To The King* was found guilty of trying too hard to imitate *Resident Evil* and subjecting players to a dull gaming experience.

The title of THQ's second attempt at an *Evil Dead* game – *A Fistful Of Boomstick* – indicates a far more appropriately tongue-in-cheek approach to capturing the B-movie ambience. Realising the graphical sophistication of the latest *Resi Evil* titles just wouldn't be fitting for the *Evil Dead* universe, the game instead uses the *State Of Emergency* engine to deliver some riotously over-the-top zombie-slaying action.

From the outset, *Boomstick* makes its intentions clear to never take itself seriously, and the ludicrously exaggerated violence of *SOE* paired with the *Evil Dead* concept is the perfect match. As with VIS's reasonably entertaining riot simulator, up to 50 enemies can be displayed on screen at once making for some bracingly fast-paced butchery. Mercifully, Ash (Campbell's character from the movies) is capable of wielding two weapons at the same time, and some of the game's most noteworthy moments come from combining the melee weapons with your trusty Boomstick in a truly brutal onslaught.

> "FROM THE OUTSET, BOOMSTICK MAKES ITS INTENTIONS CLEAR TO NEVER TAKE ITSELF TOO SERIOUSLY"

Besides our favourite chainsaw/shotgun combination our hero will enjoy the use of a sword, gattling gun and flamethrower (among others) as the game progresses, as well as a range of magical spells. Along with the copious amounts of relentless combat, the main game also involves minor puzzle-solving elements in the form of simple tasks.

There are plenty of quirky in-jokes that should keep fans amused, while Bruce Campbell's droll dialogue keeps things firmly in the *Duke Nukem* vein of flippancy. But despite the suitability of its tone and appearance, the substandard feel to *Boomstick* is unlikely to get a warm reception from the average gamer. Like the *Evil Dead* movies this is a lot of fun, but it was never meant to compete with the mainstream.



It'll take some pretty vigorous button tapping to see off up to 50 enemies at once.

The excellent target-locking feature allows you to despatch those repulsive blighters even when your back is turned.


eMag

HIDDEN AND DANGEROUS 2





Settings will vary drastically from mission to mission – just don't wear your jungle camo in the desert, eh?

IT WON'T REMAIN HIDDEN FOR MUCH LONGER NOW…

Cast your mind back to the glory days of *Syndicate* and *Cannon Fodder* when the world depended on the actions of an elite few. As computers and consoles progressed, developers felt the need to exploit this additional processing power by upping the character count. Games like *Command And Conquer* opened the eyes of gamers to the fact that they could move on from telling one or two men what to do and take control of an entire army. Thus power-trip gaming was born, but thanks to brave and dedicated developers that keep seemingly dead genres alive (Treasure and Irem, we salute you), the days of personal warfare will never die. In fact, with today's resurgence of stealthy squad combat, its time for one of the pioneering highlights of the genre to make a comeback. Ladies and gentlemen, remove your night vision goggles, *Hidden And Dangerous 2* has emerged from the shadows at last.

Having changed engine midway through development, the game now runs on the LS3D engine – an updated version of the code behind Illusion's gangster-'em-up *Mafia* that will provide more features and improved compatability, not to mention make the game look very pretty indeed. On top of the notable visual enhancements that today's fickle gaming society demands (not that we're complaining), game mechanics are being overhauled to allow the player more control and freedom in the way the 23 missions are tackled. For a start, there's no longer a lead character, your squad instead being hand-picked from a mob that makes the SAS look like Dad's Army.

Heavy-handed players will be able to put together powerful assault squads, sneakier strategists will employ snipers and the like while those more cautious will put together a varied group to keep their strategic options open. It won't just be down to individual skills either – heavy machinery and vehicles can also be assigned or 'procured' to make missions yet more interesting. Tanks, jeeps and mounted weapons all come as standard but, all being well, you should also be able to take to the air.

Squad-based shooters have come a long way since the first *Hidden And Dangerous* crept on to the PC in 1999. It was later ported to the Dreamcast, where it never really captured the hearts or imaginations of console gamers. As the sequel to one of the key games of its genre, all eyes are on *Hidden And Dangerous 2* to be another stunning title, and although it's still a way off, the makings are certainly there. Due to an emphasis on planning complex strategies rather than running in guns blazing, the game is always going to leave some people cold but the *Commandos* games, among others, are proof that a game's difficulty can often add to the appeal.

It may have been in production for years but a little time out of the spotlight seems to have done *Hidden And Dangerous 2* a world of good. In its absence, we've seen similar games come and go but few have surpassed the ageing original. Its influence has also been felt elsewhere in gaming – now that strategy-heavy titles are more acceptable to the wider audience the stage is set for karma to kick in and make this a big success.

"HEAVY MACHINERY AND VEHICLES CAN BE ASSIGNED OR 'PROCURED' AS REQUIRED TO MAKE MISSIONS YET MORE INTERESTING"

DETAILS

FORMAT: PC
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Take Two
DEVELOPER: Illusion Softworks
RELEASE: September '03
GENRE: Strategy
PLAYERS: 1-TBC

Strategic warfare on a more personal basis – select and develop your stealthy squad from dozens of recruits and build a four-man war machine.

HOW NOT TO BE SEEN

As with many games of this ilk, a key factor in victory is the element of surprise. So staying out of the way of enemies or at least blending in with your surroundings is a necessity. Obviously, this isn't *Metal Gear Solid* so those expecting futuristic optical stealth technology will be disappointed, but you will have access to the best camouflage the military has got. You'll also be able to pick your deadly quartet from a slew of well-trained operatives, each with their own skills and weapons that will depend on their background and nationality. Furthermore, your chosen soldiers will be built up as you use them, acquiring skills and experience that will aid them in the field – something that should add yet more depth to the game.



COMPANY PROFILE

■ Illusion Softworks is a Czech development house founded in 1997 with an emphasis on PC titles. Despite this, the firm has ported *Hidden And Dangerous* to several consoles and is not afraid to embrace new technology – its mobile gaming division is surely strong evidence of this.

HISTORY

- **MAFIA** 2002 [PC]
- **FLYING HEROES** 2000 [PC]
- **HIDDEN AND DANGEROUS** 1999 [PC]

■ On top of your standard issue firepower, there'll be opportunities to sample the more destructive things in life…

■ Sometimes stealth goes out of the window, as this close range firefight proves. Why can't they just throw snowballs like nice young men?

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

ALWAYS WITH THE KHAKI…

CANNON FODDER + COMMANDOS + 3D = H&D2

"GAMERS WILL CONTROL THE SPECIAL OPERATIONS EXECUTIVE SECTION THROUGH PERILOUS MISSIONS BEHIND ENEMY LINES DURING WWII"

HIDDEN AND DANGEROUS 2 PRESS RELEASE

AMPLITUDE



■ Songs tend to be broken down into four sections – make it to a Checkpoint and you'll recover a little energy.

"FOCUSING ON NOT ONLY THE THRILL OF CREATING AND MIXING MUSIC, AMPLITUDE ALSO PROVIDES A FAST-PACED, COMPETITIVE, DYNAMIC ENVIRONMENT"

SONY PRESS RELEASE

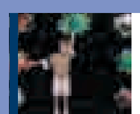
VIDEOGAMES MATHS

HOW TO AMP UP A SEQUEL

FREQUENCY - TEMPEST + ONLINE PLAY = AMPLITUDE

■ Duel mode is the ultimate test of skill, whereby one player lays down a pattern for the other to match.





COMPANY PROFILE

■ Given the quality of its recent music-based titles, it comes as no surprise to find Harmonix' catalogue entirely in the field. Before *FreQuency*, the company, which was founded in 1995, developed a curious mix of titles including PC music creation software and theme park attractions before finding popularity on the PlayStation2.

HISTORY

- **FREQUENCY** 2001 [PlayStation2]
- **CAMJAM** 1999 [Arcade]
- **THE AXE** 1998 [PC]

COULD WE BE LOOKING AT SONY'S SECRET ONLINE WEAPON?

Think of some of the most difficult games you've ever played. *Ghouls 'N Ghosts* would probably pick up a few votes, the *Super Monkey Ball* games have a place in the Hall of Frustration and now the Insanely Hard Club welcomes its newest member, *Amplitude*. Don't worry – it's not the kind of unjust trickiness we've become accustomed to, but rather a taxing test of coordination and dexterity. As a result, you may end up toiling over a single stage for hours, but when you finally clear it the sense of satisfaction is as good as any game can deliver. Showcasing four skill settings to cater for all abilities, *Amplitude* draws newcomers in as easily as it holds the attention of veteran players still trying to clear the Insane setting. Clichéd though it may be, the phrase 'easy to pick-up, difficult to master' may never have been more apt.

Where *FreQuency* had a more subdued sense of style, *Amplitude* is loud and eccentric – neon colours adorn the futuristic settings and although this palette may not be to everyone's tastes it certainly helps differentiate between tracks mid-game. As the most important factor in the game, the music will be the first aspect many people look at here. Thankfully, it's easily as good as anything offered in *FreQuency*, covering a broader spectrum of artists and styles this time around. There'll be more familiar names too, as Sony seems keen to push this title on the strengths of some of the artists involved – names like David Bowie, Garbage, Weezer and Run DMC give you an idea of what to expect, but in our experience the lesser-known artists and internally composed tracks are just as good.

The theory behind the game isn't mind-boggling – using buttons for left, middle and right, the player must match the oncoming patterns on a particular line (each of which represents an instrument) with rhythmic button presses. Once a track has been activated by playing two bars without error, it continues unassisted for a longer period allowing you to reach and activate other tracks, eventually creating a wall of sound.

The single biggest gameplay change is the shape of the tracks themselves. Gone is *FreQuency*'s tunnel layout in favour of a sonic highway, and while the inability to quickly jump to the next track may seem like a drastic oversight on the part of Harmonix, you soon realise this couldn't be further from the truth – forcing you to plan ahead and make better use of power-ups, this seemingly minor tweak makes the game feel incredibly different.

Picking up exactly where its predecessor left off, *Amplitude* stands to be one of the most addictive titles available. We've yet to sample the online side of the game but given that it covers the same game modes that impressed us in multiplayer, we're expecting very good things. Remix mode now enables you to develop custom versions of game tracks – these can then be edited further, uploaded for the world to hear or even played as new levels. This makes for a vast catalogue of new material available online, with Harmonix promising further involvement from the featured artists, be it contributing their own mixes or just picking out the best ones submitted.

Despite being a sequel, *Amplitude* manages to be a unique experience and one that will no doubt eat up all our time in the coming months.

DETAILS

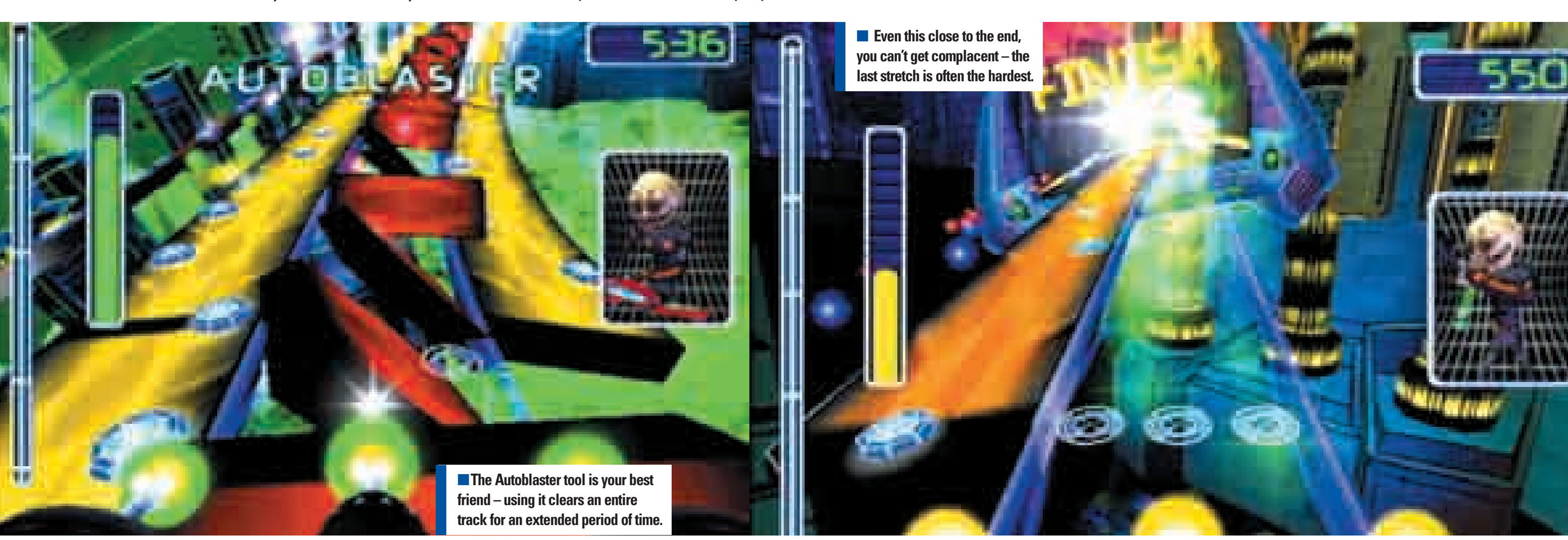
FORMAT: PS2
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: SCEE
DEVELOPER: Harmonix
RELEASE: TBC (US: Out now)
GENRE: Rhythm Action
PLAYERS: 1-4

■ *FreQuency* evolves – bigger artists, more innovations and enhanced aspects that made the original such a joy to play.

FREQS LIKE US

One of the key enhancements over *FreQuency* is the attention that has been paid to the multiplayer aspect of the game, both online and off. Facing off against one another on the regular stages or battling it out in what can only be described as 21st Century duelling banjos, the potential is enormous. Throw online play into the equation and you've got quite a potent recipe. The online set-up in the US already boasts leader boards for Versus play and archives of user-made remixes which can be downloaded and played as additional levels.

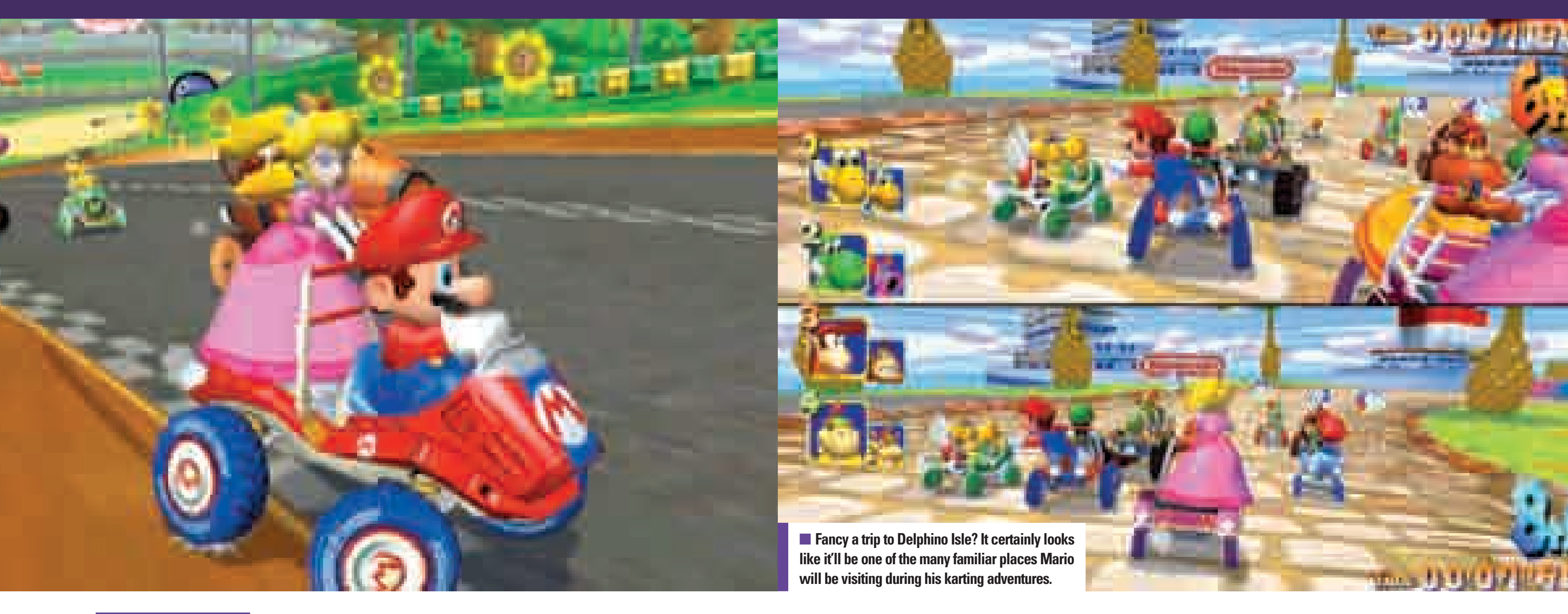
"CLICHÉD THOUGH IT MAY BE, THE PHRASE 'EASY TO PICK-UP, DIFFICULT TO MASTER' MAY NEVER HAVE BEEN SO APT"



■ The Autoblaster tool is your best friend – using it clears an entire track for an extended period of time.

■ Even this close to the end, you can't get complacent – the last stretch is often the hardest.

MARIO KART: DOUBLE DASH



■ Fancy a trip to Delphino Isle? It certainly looks like it'll be one of the many familiar places Mario will be visiting during his karting adventures.

NINTENDO INVITES YOU TO JOIN THE RACE ON A MARIO KART BUILT FOR TWO…

DETAILS

FORMAT: GameCube
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Nintendo
DEVELOPER: In-house
RELEASE: TBC (Japan: Q4 '03)
GENRE: Racing
PLAYERS: 1-4

■ We all know the SNES version was great and the N64 version wasn't. Can Miyamoto-san bring Mario's racing adventures back on track for the GameCube?

Considering Nintendo's fondness for updating its franchises every time it releases a new console, the seminal racing exploits of Mario and friends had to appear on the GameCube, despite Nintendo's fervent denials. So now, after many vague comments and even an admission from Miyamoto-san himself that he was worried about where the game should go, we've got the first look at what may be a return to form for everyone's favourite kart racer.

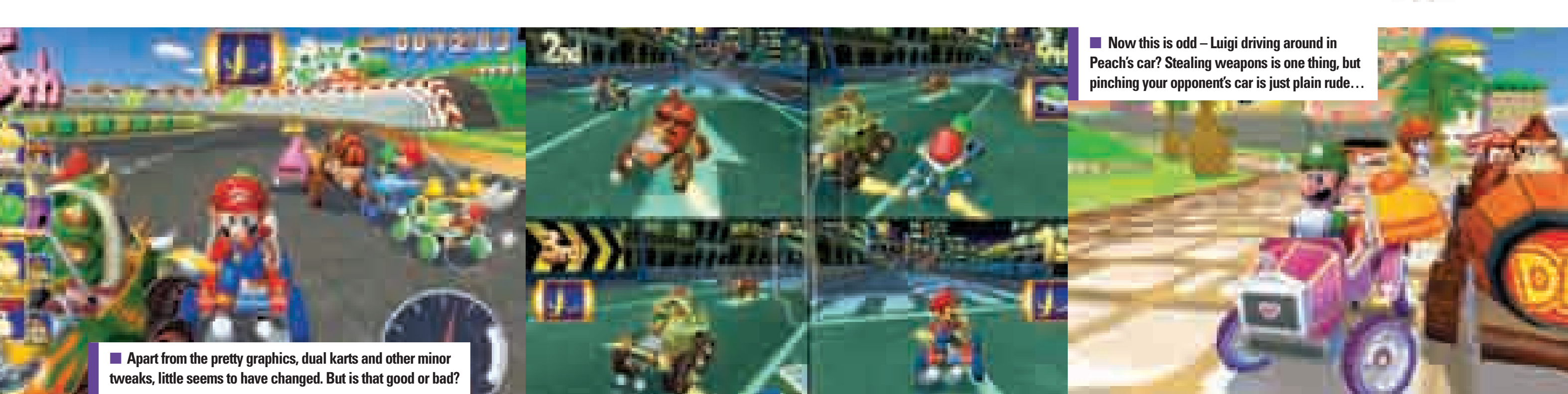
Of course, the key word there is look – Nintendo has released a slew of screenshots in time for E3 but very little information about the game. Given the new moniker of *Double Dash* though, it's clear that the most obvious change is the leap from standard racing karts to larger two-person chariot-style affairs, with one character driving and another riding shotgun. Although it's not exactly an original idea (*Circus Maximus* did it only recently, albeit slightly shoddily), this certainly opens up plenty of gameplay possibilities, especially if control of the second character is mapped to the GameCube pad's inimitable C-stick.

Not only will the rear-seated character be responsible for dishing out punishment on the opposition, but it's also likely that you'll be able to steal weapons from your enemies by leaning to the side when you get close enough. What's more, there are some weapons that can only be used by specific characters – to use them, you'll have to switch your team around on the fly and have the correct character in the rear seat.

This enhancement aside, it certainly looks like business as usual for the *Mario Kart* franchise – all the obligatory power-ups, familiar (and overly-wide) tracks from Nintendo's back catalogue of locations and even a four-player split-screen mode seem to have been carried over from the N64 version. That said, Nintendo's confirmation of the game having GameCube link-up play via the broadband adapter has got everyone excited about the joys of an eight-player mode instead of online play.

While we have to admit we're surprised that Nintendo has gone down this road, it's typical of a firm that constantly innovates with its stock titles – plus it could certainly make *Mario Kart* GC a winner in the multiplayer stakes.

"MARIO KART CERTAINLY LOOKS VERY PRETTY, BUT WHETHER IT'LL IMPROVE ON PAST LETDOWNS IS ANOTHER MATTER ALTOGETHER"

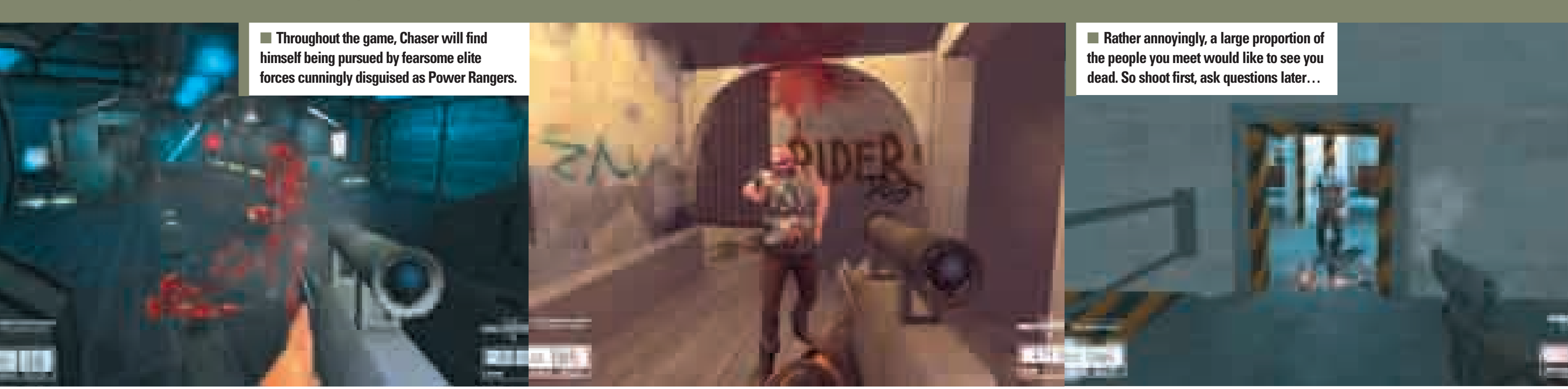


■ Apart from the pretty graphics, dual karts and other minor tweaks, little seems to have changed. But is that good or bad?

■ Now this is odd – Luigi driving around in Peach's car? Stealing weapons is one thing, but pinching your opponent's car is just plain rude…


eMag

CHASER


Throughout the game, Chaser will find himself being pursued by fearsome elite forces cunningly disguised as Power Rangers.

Rather annoyingly, a large proportion of the people you meet would like to see you dead. So shoot first, ask questions later…

AN ACTION HERO WITH NO MEMORY OF HIS FORMER LIFE ON MARS, EH? SOUNDS FAMILIAR…

There are exciting times ahead for fans of PC first-person shooters. From the glimpses we've seen of forthcoming titles like *Doom III* and *Deus Ex: Invisible War*, our mouths were left watering at the promise of gaming experiences such as the world has never seen before. However, the excitement tends to be limited to those who've invested in a top notch PC in the last few months or are dedicated enough to splash out for the upgrades necessary to actually run these beasts. But the majority of us whose home PCs can only boast a mere Ge-Force 2 video card, and are worried that the only way to expand our FPS collection is bound to involve the purchase of some meaty new hardware, should stop fretting as there are still some decent titles on the way that don't feel the necessity to break new technological ground to justify their existence.

Chaser, for instance, may not be the prettiest shooter we've played all year, nor can you expect any hugely interactive environments or open-ended gameplay, but most importantly you can bung it into any reasonable gaming PC and start enjoying the action at its fullest straight away. That's not to say *Chaser* isn't an ambitious project in itself, or that its specially developed Cloak NT engine doesn't produce some rather impressive textures and graphical effects either. Any game that comes bundled on two discs is worthy of being considered a pretty epic affair. *Chaser* is heavily story-driven and the adventures of lead character John Chaser will cover a wealth of nicely varied locations and situations.

Set in the year 2044, most of the action will take place on Earth, yet our story begins aboard a doomed space station and concludes on the recently colonised planet Mars. Chaser awakens in a medical bay with no recollection of his past and spends much of the game gradually piecing together the mystery of his time on Mars through a disturbing series of flashbacks. As the people he meets tend to either worship him as a rebel hero or want him dead at all costs, it soon becomes clear that he is involved in some rather ugly business. But Cauldron assure us that similarities with a certain Arnie movie end there.

After playing through a few levels, the length of the cut-scenes tested our patience at some stages but we found the action to be entertaining enough. Providing some of the primitive feel to the game can be ironed out before its release, *Chaser* just might be worth keeping an eye out for.

"CHASER IS HEAVILY STORY-DRIVEN AND THE ADVENTURE WILL COVER A WEALTH OF NICELY VARIED LOCATIONS"

DETAILS

FORMAT: PC
ORIGIN: Slovakia
PUBLISHER: JoWood Productions
DEVELOPER: Cauldron
RELEASE: Q2 '03
GENRE: FPS
PLAYERS: Multiplayer Online

A fairly basic action shooter with some nice variety thrown in, and an epic storyline that will intrigue the heck out of you.


As the game is set in the near future, you still get to use modern day weaponry rather than laser guns and plasma rifles.


eMag

CALL OF DUTY

A MAN CAN'T FIGHT A WAR ALONE. NO, REALLY, HE CAN'T. WE'VE TRIED…


Stealth is a very important part of any assault; if the Germans catch you running around, they'll fill you full of machine-gun lead.

Pilfering someone else's ideas is nothing new in the world of videogames. But stealing an entire team of developers from under a rival publisher's nose and then having them create a game that, at a glance, looks remarkably similar to their previous work is just damn cheeky. Nevertheless, that's exactly what Activision has done to kickstart its new *Call Of Duty* brand of war-based FPS games. Having snatched 22 members of the team behind *Medal Of Honor: Allied Assault* out of EA's clutches in the form of developer Infinity Ward, a new *MOH*-style game is now on the way.

Cunningly called *Call Of Duty* (yes, the same name as the brand itself), players can take part in several interconnecting World War II campaigns and view the action through the eyes of American, British and Russian troops. As part of a crack squad of heroes – the rest of which lay down covering fire and wait for your movements before advancing – your tasks range from sabotage and all-out assault to stealth, vehicle combat and even rescue missions.

It's so proud of what its doing that Infinity Ward has even gone so far as to say that *Call Of Duty* "immerses you in the most intense World War II experience yet". Of course, these rather bold claims are all very well, but saying that a game is totally authentic is completely different from this actually being the case. Thankfully though, it looks like Activision might be not be bragging as much as you might think – from the experience we've had of *Call Of Duty* so far, we're of the opinion that it could even rival the gritty realism of the beach landing stage from *MOH: Allied Assault*. Take the stage of the game we saw, with American soldiers moving in on German gun placements; with deafening explosions going off everywhere, enemy soldiers diving for cover and bombing raids continually flying overhead, it was a pretty daunting experience.

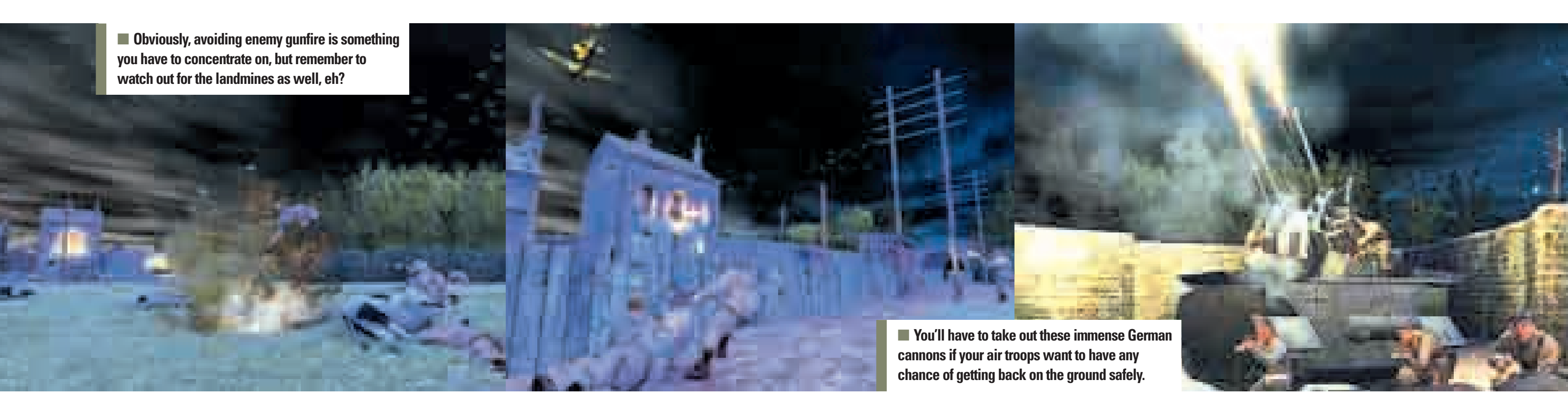
Our only concern lies in how scripted each mission will be – if the explosions and enemies appear in the same place every time, it could take some of the magic out of it all. Nevertheless, *Call Of Duty* certainly looks like it'll take the fight to *Medal Of Honor*. E3 willing, we'll have a hands-on preview next month.

"MEDAL OF HONOR SHOULD BE QUAKING IN ITS ARMY BOOTS IF THIS ENDS UP AS PLAYABLE AS IT PROMISES TO BE"

DETAILS

FORMAT: PC
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Activision
DEVELOPER: Infinity Ward
RELEASE: Q3 '03
GENRE: FPS
PLAYERS: 1-8

What better way to launch a new line in war-based FPS games than creating your very own *Medal Of Honor* clone? Exactly.


Obviously, avoiding enemy gunfire is something you have to concentrate on, but remember to watch out for the landmines as well, eh?

You'll have to take out these immense German cannons if your air troops want to have any chance of getting back on the ground safely.


eMag

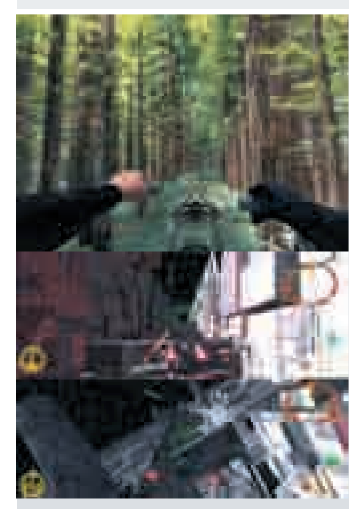
SHOWCASE

THINGS TO WATCH FOR ON THE GAMING HORIZON

ROGUE SQUADRON III: REBEL STRIKE

TALK ABOUT FORCING THE ISSUE…

Format: GameCube
Origin: US
Publisher: LucasArts
Developer: Factor 5
Release: Q4 '03 (US: Q3 '03)
Genre: Shoot-'em-up
Players: 1-2



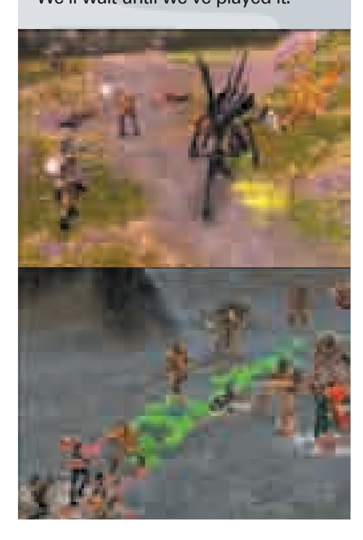
Well, there's a shock – with *Star Wars: Rogue Leader* proving to be one of the most popular games around when the GameCube launched (until *Smash Brothers Melee* appeared), it was only a matter of time before LucasArts produced a sequel. Although a full presentation of the game is set for E3, what's been leaked out so far is enough to make even the most hardened *Star Wars* cynic sit up and take notice. With enhanced graphics over *Rogue Leader* (which is quite an achievement), new stages including a speeder-bike race across Endor and an AT-ST section, as well as a two-player mode, there could be life in the old Bantha yet.

ALIEN VS PREDATOR: EXTINCTION

IN AN RTS, NO-ONE CAN HEAR YOU SCREAM

Format: PlayStation2/Xbox
Origin: US
Publisher: Electronic Arts
Developer: Zono Inc
Release: Q3 '03
Genre: RTS
Players: 1

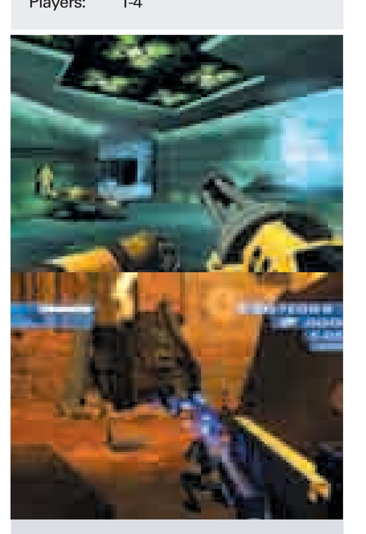
Face facts – real-time strategy games and consoles don't mix. However, EA is hoping to change all that with *Alien Vs Predator: Extinction*, by drawing in console gamers with the use of (yes, you guessed it) popular movie franchise links. With this being an RTS though, you can forget about the fast-paced action and frantic blasting of PC FPS games – instead, what you have is remarkably similar to the *Starcraft* series. Build up your troops (be they Alien, Predator or Marine) and send them to Planet LV742 to slaughter the enemy, clearing seven missions for each species to claim supremacy. Sound good? We'll wait until we've played it.



FIRE WARRIOR

OUT OF THE TABLETOP, INTO THE FIRE

Format: PlayStation2
Origin: US
Publisher: THQ
Developer: Kuju
Release: Q3 '03
Genre: FPS
Players: 1-4



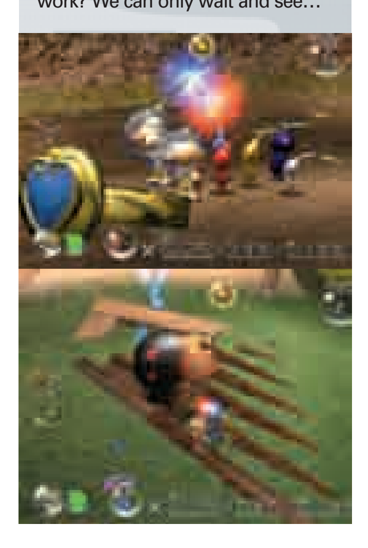
If you're into orcs, goblins and 22-sided dice, you'll probably have heard of Warhammer 40,000, one of the world's leading tabletop wargames. There have been several videogames based on the Warhammer universe, but none have appealed beyond the niche market. Until now, that is. Developed in conjunction with the experts at Games Workshop, *Fire Warrior* promises to offer all the atmosphere of the Warhammer 40,000 series while featuring decent first-person action as well. With 17 massive levels to explore and a four-player split-screen mode, it sounds quite interesting; could this be the game that brings tabletop warfare to the masses?

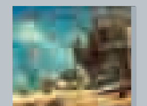
PIKMIN 2

GOING BACK TO NINTENDO'S ROOTS

Format: GameCube
Origin: Japan
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: In-house
Release: Q4 '03 (Jap: Q3 '03)
Genre: Puzzle
Players: 1-2

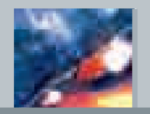
Even though we usually trust Miyamoto-san, the announcement of the original *Pikmin* left us a little unsure – mainly because it looked a bit too weird, even for us. Thankfully, the finished game was great; which is why we're slightly more welcoming when it comes to the sequel that's on its way to the GameCube. Set this time on Captain Olimar's home planet, it's your job to find valuables that can help save the company you work for. Luckily, you've still got the Pikmin to help you out (including two totally new varieties) and even an assistant who can venture off to do his own thing, effectively doubling your workload. Will it work? We can only wait and see…





DELAYED – METAL SLUG 3 (PS2)

■ Despite the fact that this highly-anticipated sequel in the *Metal Slug* series should have been out by now, it's been inexplicably and indefinitely postponed instead. Damn you, Playmore…



DELAYED – F-ZERO (GC)

■ First it was delayed, then it wasn't – but after much um-ing and ah-ing on its own release schedule, Nintendo has finally put *F-Zero* back to 25 July in Japan. But oh, how we want it so…

VIRTUAL ON: MARZ

ROBOTS IN DISGUISE? YOU WISH

Format:	PlayStation2
Origin:	Japan
Publisher:	SEGA
Developer:	Hitmaker
Release:	November '03
Genre:	Mech shoot-'em-up
Players:	1-4



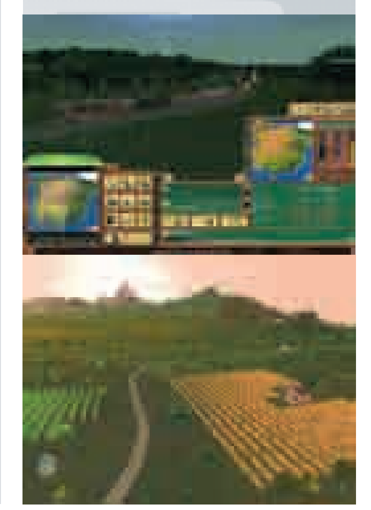
We've always had a bit of a soft spot for the *Virtual On* series; the fast-paced, arena-based blasting action did it for us in a way we just can't explain. Leap forwards into the now and you'll find *Virtual On Marz* – a game that, although being the latest instalment in the franchise, takes things in a totally different direction. Yes, you still control a huge robot intent on destroying everything in its path but now there's the addition of an absorbing Story mode complete with varied missions, tons of characters and even two-on-two mech battles. To be frank, we're not sure if this is what we want, but we're certainly prepared to wait and find out.

RAILROAD TYCOON 3

OH, TO BE THE FAT CONTROLLER

Format:	PC
Origin:	US
Publisher:	Take 2
Developer:	PopTop Software
Release:	October '03
Genre:	Simulation
Players:	1 (1-x Online)

If the thought of playing a train industry simulator brings yawns to the back of your throat, then hold it right there – checking out the upcoming *Railroad Tycoon 3* ought to change your mind. Certainly, it's very much a niche title but having spent plenty of time reworking the game so that newcomers to the series won't feel so daunted, Take 2 is hoping for big things with this follow-up. Now presented in full 3D and featuring over 40 different trains (ranging from the 1830s to the present day) and 1,000 unique maps in which to create your empire, *Railroad Tycoon 3* looks like it'll be the grand-daddy of them all.



ICE NINE

YOU'LL CATCH YOUR DEATH OUT THERE…

Format:	PlayStation2
Origin:	Australia
Publisher:	Bam! Entertainment
Developer:	Torus
Release:	July '03
Genre:	FPS
Players:	1



Ever fancied being in the CIA? Well, now's your chance – sort of. Placing you in the role of Agent Tom Carter and featuring enough hard-core weaponry to make Arnie blush, *Ice Nine* is an espionage-style first-person shoot-'em-up with a difference; namely, the fact that it uses the PS2 headset for a purpose other than online play. Although you don't absolutely need the headset to play the game, you can use it to receive info about any problems you may encounter on your mission and even call for back-up if the going gets too tough. Throw in some advanced Rag Doll physics technology and you've got the makings of a fine FPS. Hopefully.

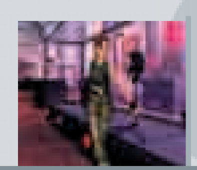
JEDI KNIGHT: JEDI ACADEMY

CAN YOU EVER HAVE ENOUGH STAR WARS GAMES?

Format:	Xbox/PC
Origin:	US
Publisher:	Activision
Developer:	Raven Software
Release:	Q3 '03
Genre:	Action/Adventure
Players:	1-4

If ever there was a *Star Wars* game that pandered to the intensely anal demands of its fans, it's *Jedi Knight: Jedi Academy*. Coming as the sequel to the successful but rather disappointing *Jedi Outcast*, LucasArts is promising that Jedi Academy will feature everything that Star Wars fans desire – namely, the ability to design your own character and even create a custom Lightsaber. Aside from that though, along with the option to pick your own path through the numerous levels and a handful of new multiplayer modes it looks like business as usual for the *Jedi Knight* series. Although whether that's a good thing is a matter of opinion.





DELAYED – TOMB RAIDER: ANGEL OF DARKNESS (MULTI)

■ A *Tomb Raider* game delayed? Although you might be stunned with shock by the announcement, Lara's latest outing has been put back again to coincide with the movie release… in July. Bah.

"ROLEPLAYING ON YOUR CONSOLE? IT MIGHT WORK, AND COULD EVEN BRING TABLETOP WARFARE TO THE MASSES…"

FIRE WARRIOR, THQ

EVEN MORE THINGS TO WATCH FOR ON THE GAMING HORIZON

XGRA

ACCLAIM FEELS THE NEED FOR SPEED

Format: PS2/Xbox/GameCube
Origin: UK
Publisher: Acclaim
Developer: Acclaim St Cheltenham
Release: August '03
Genre: Racing
Players: 1-4



Although we prefer the *WipEout* way of thinking when it comes to futuristic high-speed racing games, there's no denying that *Xtreme G 3* was fun to play and damn fast to boot. With nothing even resembling a fourth *WipEout* title in sight though, we're inclined to think that *XGRA* (the fourth instalment of the *Xtreme G* series) might be what we're looking for to satisfy our need for speed. Promising destructible scenery, a new weapon system, six new race types and even the choice between slimline bikes or heavily-armed bike and side-car combos (less speed, more firepower), Acclaim could at last have another good game on its hands.

SEGA GT ONLINE

PINK SLIPS AT THE READY, GENTLEMEN

Format: Xbox
Origin: Japan
Publisher: SEGA
Developer: WOW Entertainment
Release: Q3 '03
Genre: Driving
Players: 1-6

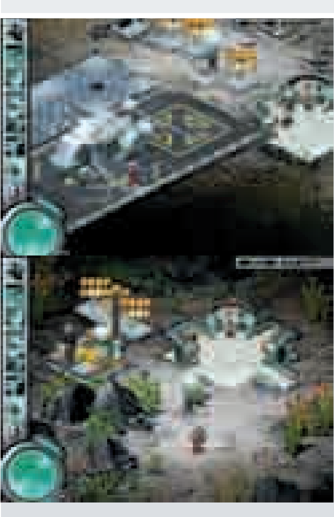
Right, who's waiting for *Gran Turismo 4*? Quite a lot of you, no doubt. Unfortunately, it's still a fair way off so if you fancy a bit of online simulated racing before it comes out, you'll have to get your hands on an Xbox and a copy of *SEGA GT Online*. The thing is, SEGA's new racer sounds like a bizarre hybrid – you've got the subtle simulation nuances of *Gran Turismo* (being able to tweak over 160 cars until your fingers bleed) and tons of different licence challenges and races, while on the other you've got high-octane arcade racing that works in an online environment. It'll be interesting to see if it's a success or not…



SPACE COLONY

TO BOLDLY GO AND ALL THAT JAZZ

Format: PC
Origin: UK
Publisher: Take 2
Developer: FireFly Studios
Release: September '03
Genre: Management sim
Players: 1



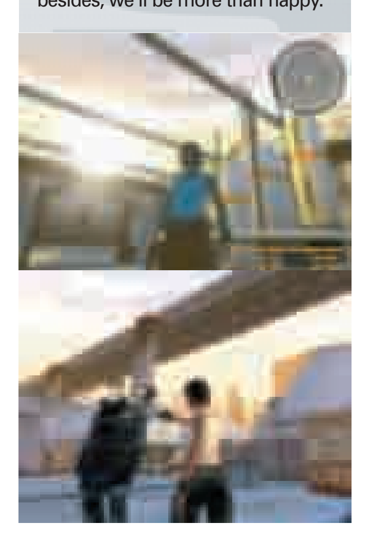
Those guys at Take 2 love their PC management games – having already brought us the likes of *Stronghold* and *Stronghold: Crusader* (both castle-based RTS games), developer FireFly Studios has now moved into outer space for its next project. You'll get to build a space colony from the ground up, terraforming the planet, mining minerals to make cash and then looking after the colonists through all manner of micro-management. Of course, it's not that easy – once you start doing well, aliens will take notice and try to take a piece of the pie for themselves. We doubt it'll set the world alight, but that doesn't mean it won't be half-decent.

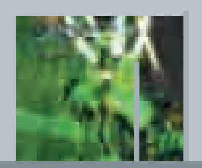
HEADHUNTER: REDEMPTION

ONCE HUNTED, TWICE SHY

Format: PlayStation2/Xbox
Origin: Sweden
Publisher: SEGA
Developer: Amuze
Release: Q4 '03
Genre: Adventure
Players: 1

If there was a word that summed up the original Dreamcast version of *Headhunter*, it would be 'unappreciated'. While most people passed it off as a *Metal Gear Solid* rip-off, those who took the time to play it found an absorbing adventure that did SEGA proud. So we're pleased that a sequel is already in the pipeline, although the fact that it's now set in a bizarre future world rather than the *Robocop*-style metropolis of the first game leaves us slightly worried. Nevertheless, as long as SEGA and Sweden-based developer Amuze can give us a healthy mix of the original's gameplay and a whole lot more besides, we'll be more than happy.





DELAYED – MALICE (MULTI)

■ Vivendi's 'girl with a mechanical hammer' game was supposed to be out absolutely ages ago, but seems to have disappeared off the radar completely. Not that we're that bothered, of course, but we do like to be kept up to date. They never write, they never phone…

"WITH DARK HUMOUR, HEAD-SCRATCHING PUZZLES AND BIKE BATTLES WE'RE REALLY LOOKING FORWARD TO THIS ONE"

FULL THROTTLE: HELL ON WHEELS, LUCASARTS

FULL THROTTLE: HELL ON WHEELS

RE-BORN TO BE WILD

Format: PlayStation2/Xbox/PC
Origin: US
Publisher: LucasArts
Developer: In-house
Release: Q1 '04 (US: Q4 '03)
Genre: Adventure
Players: 1



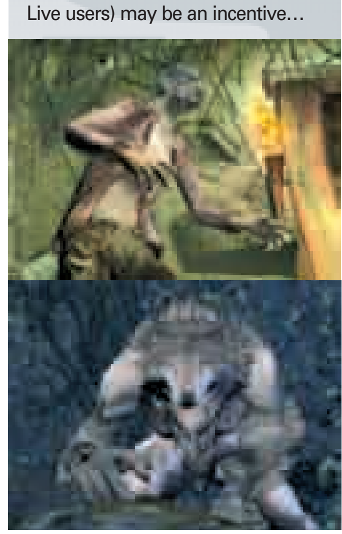
If there's one thing LucasArts has always been good at, it's point 'n' click adventures – right from the classic days of *Maniac Mansion*, we've loved them all. So it's no surprise to learn that the announcement of *Full Throttle: Hell On Wheels* has got us more than a little excited. As the follow-up to the original *Full Throttle* (which was basically *Monkey Island* on a motorbike), you still play Ben, leader of the Polecats gang and all-round tough-but-nice guy. This time though, you're out to save a town from destruction. With dark humour, head-scratching puzzles and bike battles similar to the original, we're really looking forward to this one.

SHADOW OF THE SUN

FANGS FOR THE MEMORIES

Format: PS2/Xbox/GameCube
Origin: UK
Publisher: TBC
Developer: HotHead Studios
Release: TBC
Genre: FPS
Players: 1-4

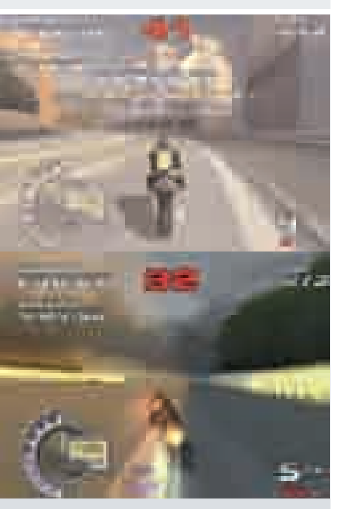
What would you get if someone came up with the idea of taking the concept behind the *Legacy Of Kain* series and mixing it with various first-person shoot-'em-ups? Probably something like *Shadow Of The Sun* – a vampire-based FPS from newly-formed HotHead Studios. Promising a compelling story encompassing love and revenge, unique vampire abilities that add an extra dimension to the gameplay and numerous puzzles to solve, *Shadow Of The Sun* sounds like most of the *Kain* games, albeit from a first-person perspective. The multiplayer action and downloadable content (for Xbox Live users) may be an incentive…



SPEED KINGS

ON YER BIKE, MY SON

Format: PlayStation2
Origin: UK
Publisher: Acclaim
Developer: Climax Studios
Release: July '03
Genre: Racing
Players: 1-2



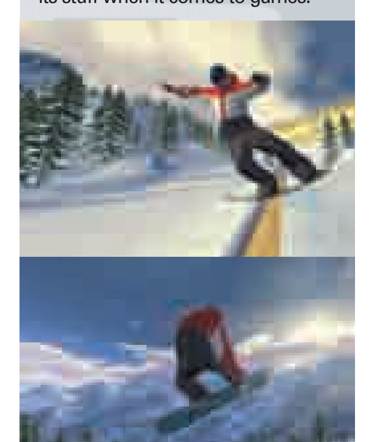
Remember *Road Rash* – the bike-racing game where reaching the finish line wasn't quite as important as wrapping a lead pipe around your opponent's helmet? Well, Acclaim obviously do. By taking the basic premise of EA's racer and combining it with all the speed of *Burnout*, it's come up with *Speed Kings*; a motorbike game with the emphasis on danger. If you want to come top in the Meets mode (basically a souped-up championship), you'll have to use all your racing skill and a whole lot of death-defying stunts to finish in first place. From what we've played, it's not all that bad, but will it have the stamina to knock *Burnout 2* off the top spot?

AMPED 2

PURER THAN THE DRIVEN SNOW

Format: Xbox
Origin: US
Publisher: Microsoft
Developer: MS Game Studios
Release: Q4 '03
Genre: Sports
Players: 1-4 (1-8 Online)

Although the first *Amped* did okay when it came out, it wasn't as well received as it could have been – a shame, as it was actually quite a good title. Thankfully, Microsoft is looking to set the record straight with *Amped 2*; a faster, more intense sequel that gives even more over what the original had. Featuring 14 of the world's top snowboarders and completely realistic locations (such as Harris Mountain in New Zealand and Mount Buller in Australia) as well as more tricks, a deeper Career mode, an enhanced Snowpark and Boarder Creation section and over 300 music tracks, this could be the one that proves Microsoft knows its stuff when it comes to games.





It's a jungle out there… **Sabre Wulf Spectrum [Ultimate] 1984**


I
275
2UP
000000

WE'RE IN THE MOOD TO CELEBRATE THE FINEST THE INDUSTRY HAS TO OFFER – SO WELCOME TO THE FIRST ANNUAL GAMES™ AWARDS

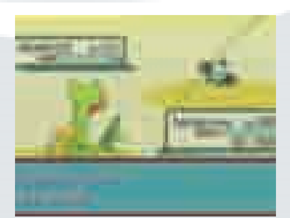
games™ awards 2003

It's amazing what a difference a year makes. Nintendo's plight takes a turn for the worse, online gaming goes from obscurity to a new religion and we've played *Animal Crossing* no less than 365 times. We've seen companies come and go, heroes rise and fall… par for the course in the industry, really. Looking back, we see a lot of games that, however successful they may be, can never be praised highly enough and, sadder still, will never find the loving homes they deserve. We racked our tortured brains to come up with a selection of the year's most impressive titles in a number of categories and that's our half of the deal done; but now it's over to you. Yes, you now have the power to say what you've liked and what you've downright loathed over the past twelve months. Look through the selections we've made, pick out the ones you feel best deserve universal recognition and then get in touch with us via the contact details at the end of the nominations. Your views matter, people…

GAME | OF THE YEAR

THE FINEST PIECE OF SOFTWARE FROM THE LAST TWELVE MONTHS OF GAMING

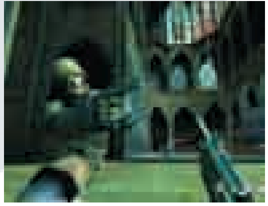
This is it. The big one. The single best game of the past year. Since it's such a mighty accolade, we've given you a whopping ten titles to choose from, but which will be declared Game Of The Year? You tell us…



Pokémon Ruby/Sapphire (Game Boy Advance)
It may not be the leap forward we had been hoping for, but that certainly hasn't stopped us losing countless hours to the collectable pocket monsters. It's definitely not just for kids, you know.



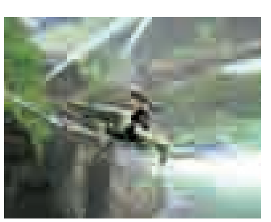
Dark Cloud 2 (PlayStation2)
More dark horse than *Dark Cloud*, this came out of nowhere and blew us away on every level. A massive commitment, but they don't come much more rewarding than this.



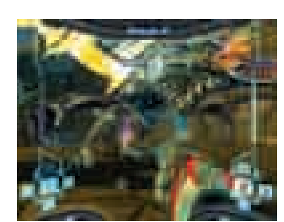
TimeSplitters 2 (Multiformat)
From the initial homage to *GoldenEye* to the hours of single and multiplayer goodness that ensue, Free Radical's shooter is an absolute blast – regardless of which format you choose to play.



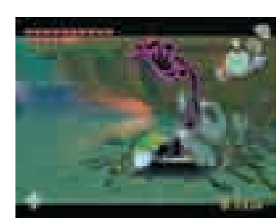
Ikaruga (Multiformat)
One of the last titles for SEGA's final machine and it was blinding (almost literally) – sumptuous visuals, amazing gameplay and a rock hard challenge to boot. Absolutely essential.



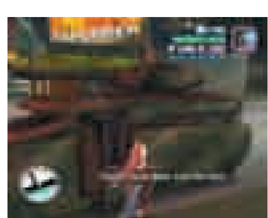
Panzer Dragoon Orta (Xbox)
Smilebit proves its Xbox prowess beyond all doubt with this gorgeous shooter that may not be revolutionary, but you'll be hard pressed to find a game that does this any better.



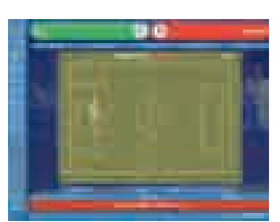
Metroid Prime (GameCube)
As the only game to garner our highest 'perfect ten' accolade, Retro's masterpiece is easily one of the best games of this year for us. A supreme adventure and a remarkable achievement.



The Legend Of Zelda: The Wind Waker (GameCube)
Link's controversial new look might have turned some people off, but it defines his most stylish adventure yet. They don't come much better than this.



Grand Theft Auto: Vice City (Multiformat)
A predictable choice perhaps, but *Vice City* deserves its place in the finalists as much as any other title here, showcasing depth and an attention to detail that shames many also-rans.



Championship Manager 4 (PC)
Not everyone's idea of a good time (statistical football? Pah) but for those that get it, this is one of the purest management games money can buy on any format. Utterly addictive.



Winning Eleven 6: Final Evolution (Multiformat)
As the greatest digital outing for the beautiful game, *WE6:FE* is by far one of the finest sports games we've seen in a long time and is as close to soccer perfection as consoles will allow.

BEST | PERIPHERAL

TAKING CONTROL TO THE NEXT LEVEL

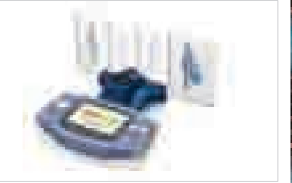
Constantly evolving games call for constantly evolving controllers. Here we salute those who dare to produce something a little different.



Logic 3 Metal Dance Platform
As close to having an arcade machine in your home as you can get without, well, buying a cabinet. Sturdy as hell and super-responsive, this is a must-have.



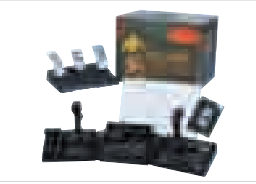
WaveBird
While it may initially seem like a bit of a novelty, after sampling the wireless delights of the WaveBird you won't want to go back to being restrained.



e-Card Reader
Ingenious device or moneymaking gimmick? The e-Reader is still in its infancy yet already we've been treated to some impressive functionality. One to watch.



Controller S
Replacing the target of much fan-boy ridicule, the Controller S is a marked improvement over the chunky original and is now one of the best controllers out there.



Steel Battalion Controller
It isn't quite as sturdy or as functional as it could/should be, but nevertheless *Steel Battalion* would be just another mech game without this 40-button beast.

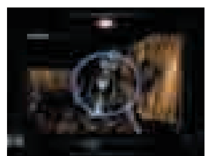
MOST | UNDERRATED TITLE

CELEBRATING THE ONES THAT GOT AWAY…

However good a title may be, there's never a guarantee that sales figures will reflect this. We still weep over the poor sales of *Ico* and *Rez*, but what games have been equally hard done by this year?



Legaia 2: Duel Saga
(PlayStation2)
The slow start scared off a few, but put in the time and the rewards are there for the taking. Surely this is one of the finest RPGs of this hardware generation?



Project Zero
(Multiformat)
Arguably the scariest game available on any current console, it's just too bad Joe Public never really gave himself the chance to know fear.



Panzer Dragoon Orta
(Xbox)
When one of the most stunning and highly playable Xbox games of the year debuts in the multiformat charts at number 21, something isn't right.



Quantum Redshift
(Xbox)
Curly Monsters' futuristic racer may have been their last hurrah but we won't be forgetting it soon. If only there was a 'Worst Box Art' award.

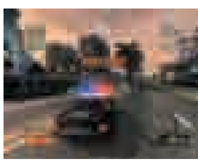


Starfox Adventures
(GameCube)
Slammed by many after Rare's departure from Nintendo, this may not be their finest game but it certainly deserves a little more love than it got.

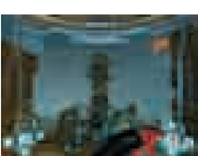
BEST | USE OF SOUND

EAR-BLEEDING SCREAMS TO RICOCHETING SHELLS, BUT WHO DOES IT BEST?

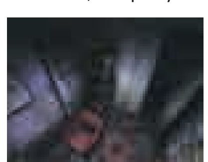
Surround, 5.1, Pro Logic… it's all very well knowing your way around the jargon, but the key factor is how good the game actually sounds. With in-game scores and effects better than ever, it's up to you to separate the men from the subwoofers.



Burnout 2
(Multi)
Thank you, Dolby, for making those wince-inducing crashes all the more painful. And the custom soundtrack feature in the Xbox version was a treat.



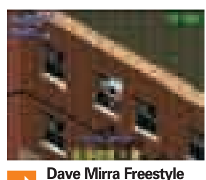
Metroid Prime
(GameCube)
The GameCube's Pro Logic support is put through its paces beautifully by Samus' surroundings. Some of the best audio on the Nintendo console.



Silent Hill 2: Director's Cut (Multiformat)
While the *Silent Hill* games are notorious for their disturbing soundtracks, it was the creepy enhancements for the Xbox version that had us worried…



DDRMAX
(PlayStation2)
A rhythm action title without decent sound is like an RPG without statistics. Fortunately, *Max* features the most impressive selection of tunes yet.



Dave Mirra Freestyle BMX 3
(Game Boy Advance)
The astonished gazes are still there when we go for a tail whip – the MP3-quality tunes that accompany the tricks are a technical miracle.

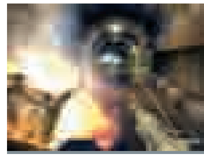
BEST | MULTIPLAYER

FOR WHEN ONE PLAYER JUST ISN'T ENOUGH…

Got mates? Get multiplayer. We're not talking tacked-on modes or sub-par rip-offs, either. Which of these would you choose to be the basis of a good, wholesome night in?



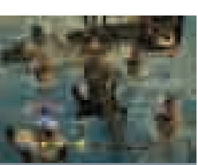
Winning Eleven 6: Final Evolution
(Multiformat)
We can't work out how many hours have been lost on four-player footballing. You won't find a more rewarding team game.



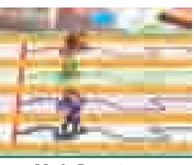
TimeSplitters 2
(Multiformat)
Frantic old-school shooting at its finest. It might not be especially big or clever, but when it's done this well we tend not to worry about the particulars.



Super Monkey Ball 2
(GameCube)
We love SEGA's simians – the six new party games superbly complement the updated originals. Four-player Monkey Target is genius.



Kung Fu Chaos
(Xbox)
Until we get the chance to wrap our grubby paws around *Power Stone 3*, this is a damn fine substitute – not to mention being funny to boot.

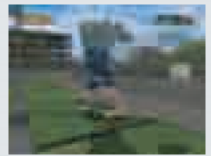


Mario Party 4
(GameCube)
The board game theme may not be to everyone's liking, but the number and quality of the mini-games make up for this. The best way to lose mates.

BEST | USE OF A LICENCE

MAKING THE TRANSITION FROM SCREEN TO DISC AN EFFORTLESS ONE

Many people think licensed games are awful – and they're right. But among the familiar faces trying to sell poor games, there are always a few standout titles that benefit from licensing rather than exploiting it.



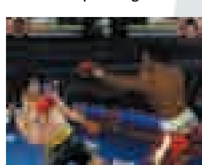
Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 4 (Multiformat)
Working on two levels, this is licensed both in terms of participants and soundtrack. Did we mention that it's an excellent game too?



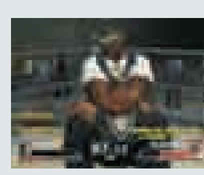
DDRMAX (PlayStation2)
Mixing licensed music tracks with the usual J-pop was a risky move but Konami do it in style. 2 Unlimited's videogame debut is not to be missed.



Jurassic Park: Operation Genesis (Multiformat)
We're surprised no-one thought of this sooner. Build your theme park, create dinosaurs and invite the public into your reptilian deathtrap.



Rocky (Multiformat)
The use of an ageing licence often seems a cheap way to sell a few games, but Rage's rather good boxing title works wonderfully in its own right.



Def Jam Vendetta (Multiformat)
The premise may not be the most inspiring (gangsta wrestling is so passé) but we have to hand it to AKI and EA – the final product is pleasantly surprising.

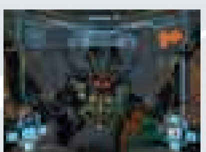
BEST | VISUALS

PUSHING THE SYSTEMS TO THEIR NUMBER-CRUNCHING LIMITS

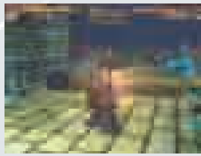
Ah, eye candy – the staple diet of many a gamer. But we're certainly not going to turn down a free lunch, especially when it looks this fine. There have been some worryingly impressive games this year but only one can reign supreme.



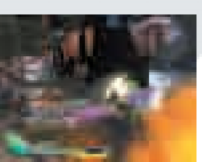
The Legend Of Zelda: The Wind Waker (GameCube)
You're allowed to slap people who pan Link's new look. If ever a game showed how close games and art can be, this is it.



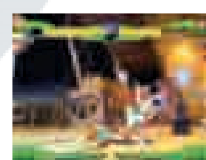
Metroid Prime (GameCube)
Recreating Samus' world(s) in three dimensions can't have been easy, but Retro has pulled it off better than we could have ever imagined.



Dark Cloud 2 (PlayStation 2)
Cel-shading may be the new cel-shading, but that doesn't stop Level 5's incredible sequel from dropping jaws every time. Simply stunning.



Panzer Dragoon Orta (Xbox)
One of the most graphically solid titles we've ever seen, *PDO* has no problems throwing around lighting, explosions and countless enemies.



Street Fighter Alpha 3 (Game Boy Advance)
They said it couldn't be done, until those clever chaps at Crawfish proved the world wrong with this incredible port. They shall be missed.

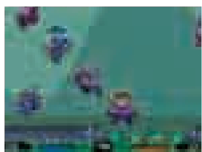
BEST | COMEBACK

FAMILIAR TITLES BROUGHT BACK FROM THE GRAVE

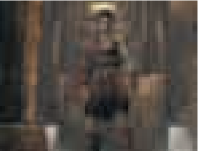
Rejuvenating an old favourite is a sure-fire way of hooking nostalgic gamers and bagging a few extra sales. They're always a mixed bag and for every gem like the five titles below, there's always a *SpyHunter*. Sorry, guys, but it really was awful…



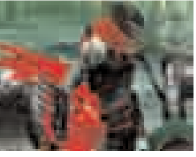
Contra: Shattered Soldier (PlayStation2)
Forget the PSone version ever happened – *Shattered Soldier* is as retro as they come and we wouldn't want it any other way.



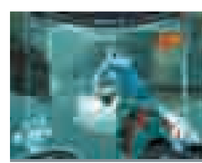
Speedball 2: Brutal Deluxe (Game Boy Advance)
A port, but a damn fine one. We're sure we're not alone in welcoming one of the best sports games ever to its new home.



Rygar: The Legendary Adventure (PlayStation2)
Perhaps an odd choice for a comeback, but we're glad Tecmo revived him. Rygar proves he's still got the gameplay.



Shinobi (PlayStation 2)
Like it or not, ninjas are cool. SEGA know this as well as anybody and breathing new life into the action series of yesterday is a fine way of showing it. And we're glad they did.



Metroid Prime (GameCube)
Seeing as how an N64 outing for Samus was not to be, this GameCube gem is her first job since *Super Metroid*, and it's like she never went away.

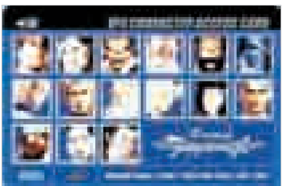
BEST | INNOVATION

FRESH GAMING EXPERIENCES

Without innovation, this world would be a dull place, particularly when it comes to the hi-tech arena of gaming. So which of these ingenious devices conjures up the words 'oooh' and 'aaah' the most?



Game Boy Advance SP
We wanted it. You wanted it. We all got it. Rechargeable, illuminated and stylish – mobile gaming may never be the same again.



SEGA Arcade Card System
A memory card of sorts, this clever piece of card lets you carry on where you left off and even own your very own virtual horse. Practicality, thy name is SEGA.



Xbox Live
A fine network with some fine games, Microsoft's 'walled garden' approach to online gaming looks like it might just have paid off.



Game Park GP32
The most versatile handheld around, the GP32 plays not only games but movies and music too. Could this be the future of portable gaming?



Steel Battalion
Any game brave enough to sport a three-digit price tag and a 'some assembly required' label has to be acknowledged. A unique experience that has to be tried.

BEST | DEVELOPER

THE CRÈME DE LA CRÈME OF THE BRAINS BEHIND THE GAMES

When we're all going crazy over a great new title, it's easy to forget that it only came about due to the vision and talent of a dedicated team. So who has earned your respect?



Konami
Dancing, stealth, shooting, sports – if another developer can boast anywhere near this level of diversity, and with consistently high quality, we'd very much like to meet them. If they exist.





IO Interactive
Only one game this year (*Hitman 2*) but a 100 per cent impress rate is nothing to be sniffed at. Going on prior form and future projects, we're watching this one carefully…



Nintendo
You only have to spend ten minutes with the likes of *The Wind Waker*, *Mario Sunshine* or *Metroid Prime* to realise that there's still plenty of Nintendo magic in the air.



SEGA
The many divisions of SEGA have churned out some of the most entertaining titles of the past twelve months – it'd be plain rude to ignore this contribution to gaming.



Crawfish
Gone but not forgotten, Crawfish had a way with the Game Boy Advance like no other. If they were still going, we wouldn't have ruled out a handheld version of *Halo*…

BEST | PUBLISHER

DON'T BLAME THE MIDDLEMAN…

Like development teams, publishing houses do exceptionally important jobs yet seldom receive the recognition they often deserve. Now's your chance to show that special firm just how much you care…



Capcom
The burdens of development and publishing don't weigh heavy on Capcom's shoulders – *Devil May Cry* and *Resident Evil* are now household names thanks to a little elbow grease.



Nintendo
Handling huge titles like *Mario* and *Zelda* is no mean feat and the Nintendo team has done a mighty fine job of getting its key products out there in the shops and into your homes.



Electronic Arts
EA's run of above-average games is matched only by its diversity. The likes of *Def Jam Vendetta*, *Shox*, *NBA Street Vol. 2* and *Sim City 4* have all been keeping us occupied…

KONAMI

Konami
Why stop at development when you can publish your own software too? A wonderful variety brought to the widest possible audience with a great deal of aplomb.



Wanadoo
As the team that brought us *Project Zero*, *Speedball 2* and *Rygar* to name but a few, French firm Wanadoo has gone from strength to strength this year, and looks set to continue.

STAND UP AND BE COUNTED

■ THE NOMINATIONS ARE IN, BUT WHICH ONES DO YOU THINK DESERVE VICTORY?

So there you have it. We've compiled a list of some of the finest software and the most important firms in the industry and it's down to you to let us know which are the best. Voting couldn't be simpler – either send us your choices in an email to **gamestmawards@paragon.co.uk** or jot them down and stick them in the post to:

games™ Awards, Paragon Publishing, Paragon House, St Peters Road, Bournemouth, Dorset, BH1 2JS

■ Closing date for voting is 1 July, after which we'll sift through all your submissions and collate the data until an overall victor can be declared in each category. Expect to see the views of the nation in a few issue's time – but for now, let the voting begin…


BLACKBIRD

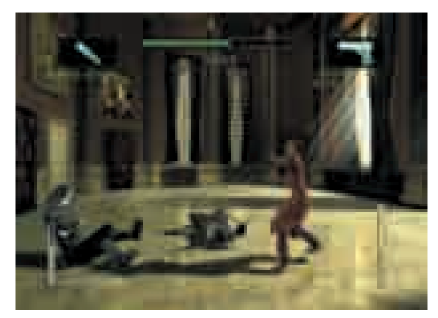


First it was Samus Aran, now Vanessa Z. Schneider has got suited and booted to grace a space-age adventure. But will Capcom's athletic heroine be leaping on to your 'Cube?

REVIEWS

THE AVERAGE

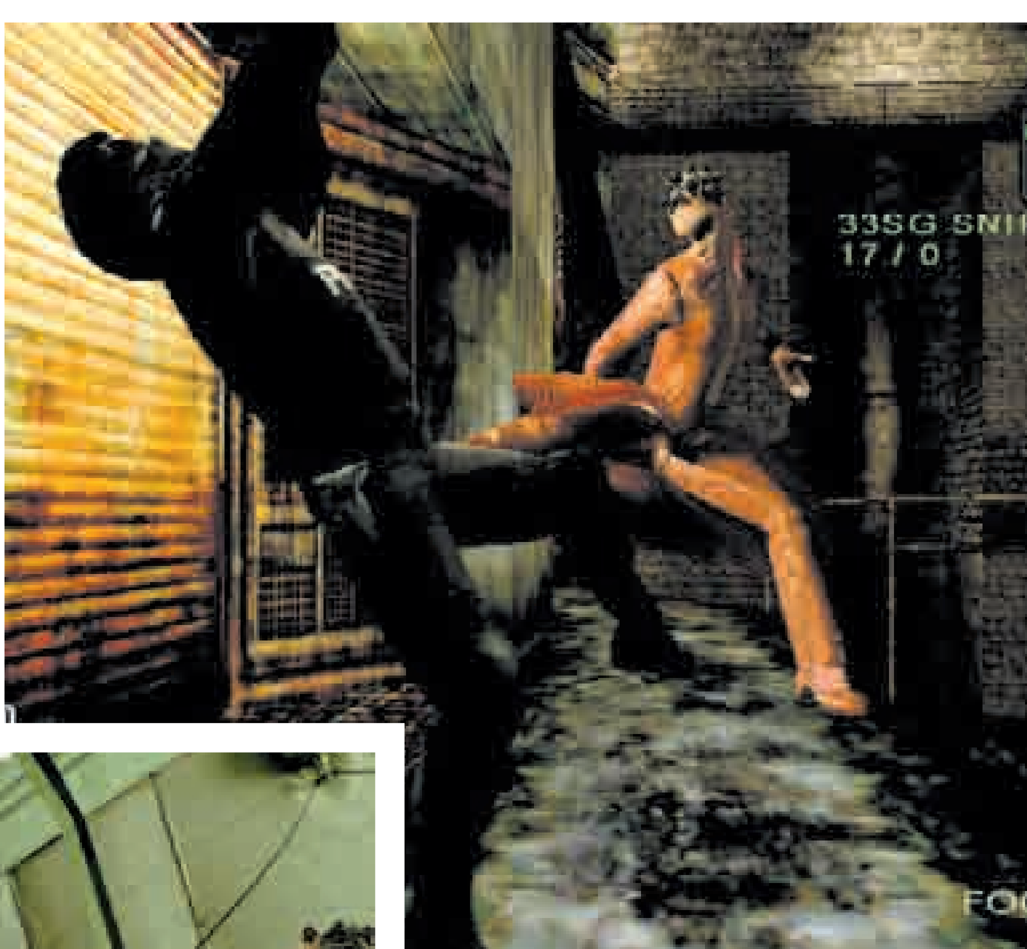
Despite representing an industry in which high scores mean everything, **games™** is not a magazine that marks with the majority. A lot of people think that anything below 7 (7.0, 70%, whatever) is a bad score – we don't. Going on a scale of one to ten, five is the average – average being a game that does what it sets out to do without attempting to do it better than anyone else. If a game gets five, you'll get some enjoyment out of it but nothing more, simple as that. What's more, we won't be swayed by PR people telling us what a game's like – we only decide once we've played each game to death and, in the majority of cases, to completion. If a game's bad, we'll make sure you know; if it's great, we'll sing its praises. At the end of the day, we're just here to help you decide what's worth your hard-earned cash. After all, if it wasn't for you, we'd be out of a job.



Wooden stakes, long black hair and some decidedly sharpened fangs… but they're not vampires. At least, that's what we've been told.

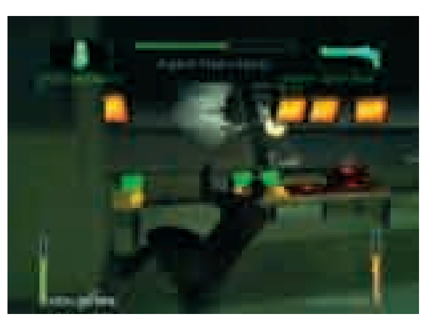


Yes, it's true – bullet-time does indeed rock. However, there's only so many times you can see it before it gets rather repetitive…





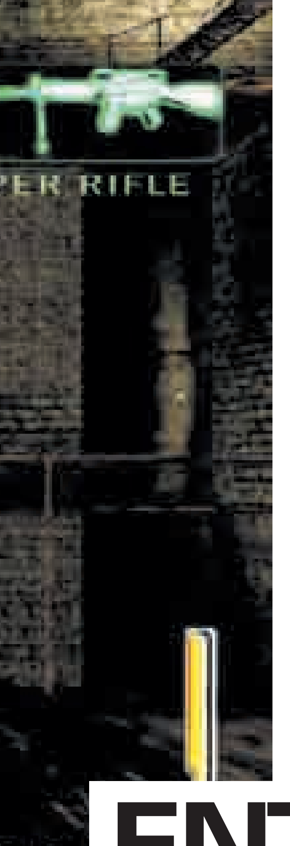
Agents – you wouldn't want to meet one in a normal alley, let alone a dark one. But at least he dresses well.

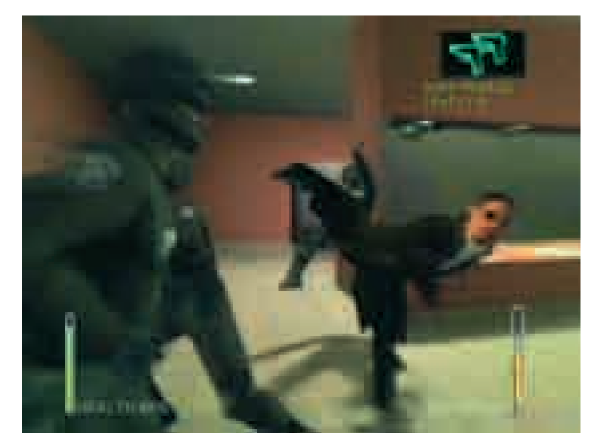


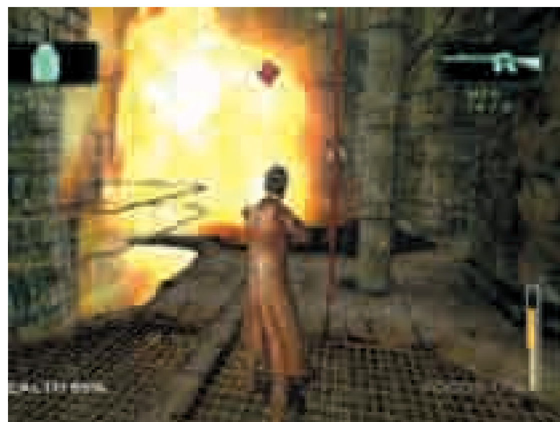
Taking on a helicopter with a shotgun? It'll never work – unless you're in fighting in the Matrix, of course.



Admittedly, the cut-scenes are probably the best thing about *Enter The Matrix* – but even then, the ones created using in-game graphics look slightly dodgy at times…







FORGET THE SPOON – HOW ABOUT 'THERE IS NO GAMEPLAY'?

ENTER THE MATRIX

Fans of *The Matrix* we may be, but that doesn't make us gullible fanboys; which is probably why even up to the moment when we sat down with the finished code, we were highly sceptical about Infogrames' *Enter The Matrix*. Call it a hunch, but even putting our preconceptions about games based on films aside, or considering the fact that Shiny Entertainment's pedigree is actually pretty commendable, didn't help. Of course, actually playing the game does makes all the difference, especially when it proves our lack of faith was well-placed all along.

Of course, it doesn't really matter what mark we give *Enter The Matrix*; it's still set to rake in millions worldwide, purely on the basis that it's a game about *The Matrix* (a sure-fire seller, regardless of when it hits the shelves) being released at the same time as *Matrix Reloaded*. Perfect timing? Naturally. It's the key to success as far as movie licensed games go, which is probably why *Tomb Raider* keeps slipping back (the movie sequel is due in the summer) or why games like *Mission: Impossible*, *Evil Dead: Hail To The King* and *Reign Of Fire* did so well despite the fact that they were all absolutely awful.

Having seen more than enough cash-printing movie licences being snapped up and turned into piss-poor games for the sake of a quick buck in the past, it's only natural that many people expected *Enter The Matrix* to be nothing more than your basic third-person action adventure, much like *Spider-Man*, *Harry Potter* and most other movie-licensed games today.

Surprise surprise, *Enter The Matrix* has turned out to be a basic third-person 3D action adventure – albeit one with an incredibly good story and some minor flashes of innovation. This uninspired first impression explains the lack of coverage for the game in previous issues of **games™**. True, the game certainly looks the business (most of the time) but pretty graphics don't make a good game – especially when it's a game that has the hindrance of being based on a movie in the first place. Thankfully, the game's link with the movie trilogy is one of the redeeming features of *Enter The Matrix*; mainly because of the hands-on approach that the Wachowski brothers have taken with the plot of the game. Unlike most other movie tie-in efforts, *Enter The Matrix* isn't 'the game of the film' with levels and set-pieces based around certain events in the movie. Instead, it's a supplement to the movies, to

DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
Xbox

OTHER FORMATS
PS2, GameCube, PC

ORIGIN
US

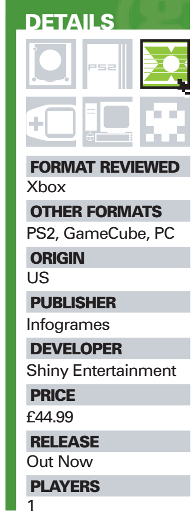
PUBLISHER
Infogrames

DEVELOPER
Shiny Entertainment

PRICE
£44.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1


BLOODRAYNE
BETTER THAN


JUST LIKE
MAX PAYNE

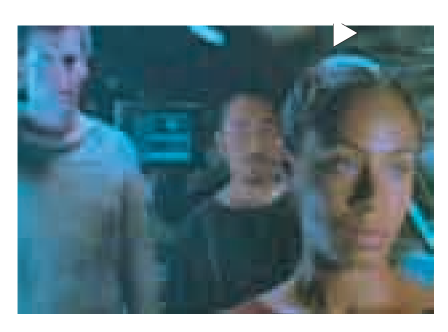
FAQs

Q. GHOST OR NIOBE?
It's up to you. Not only do they have their own range of bullet-time moves, but some of the levels differ depending on who you've picked.

Q. MUCH TO DO?
Ghost and Niobe each have around 15 stages to explore. But most stages are split into sub-sections, meaning it's not as short as it sounds.

Q. GOOD MOVIE CLIPS?
The game's film segments were shot at the same time as the movie and it shows – same actors, same sets and even the same high-level film stock.

The kung-fu is quite nice, but once the enemies start arming themselves, you won't get to use it as often as you might like.



A NIGHT AT THE MOVIES

Although they're few and far between when compared to the cut-scenes using the in-game engine, the best bits of *Enter The Matrix* are easily the movie sequences that were specially filmed for the game. Rather than cribbing scenes from the films (as EA's *Lord Of The Rings: The Two Towers* did), the scenes in *Enter The Matrix* were created during the filming of *The Matrix Reloaded* using the same actors and locations from the movie. Although some scenes will be familiar once you've seen the movie (the plot crosses that of *Reloaded* several times), they tell a different story rather than replicating one you already know. At least Shiny tried something not many other games have done before…

be played alongside, after or even during if you're that way inclined. By using a plot that runs parallel to that of *Matrix Reloaded* rather than taking scenes straight from it, it's clear that the game is intended to be a separate experience.

It's through this method of storytelling that the game expands on the adventures of its two lead characters, Ghost and Niobe. Choosing between the two doesn't just decide who you are; it also dictates unique fighting moves, routes through levels and even which stages you get to play. Take Ghost and Niobe's trip to the airport to save a friend from the Agents, for instance. After battling an army of SWAT team members, you discover that your mate is being taken away in a plane. If you're playing as Niobe, you'll head out onto the tarmac and try to intercept the plane, before battling an Agent inside; play as Ghost, though, and you'll be laying down covering fire from the nearby Control Tower, battling an Agent in a helicopter and then racing across an aquaduct in a police vehicle to keep up with the plane overhead. It's a decent enough idea and one that helps add a little replay value when you come to play through as the second character. We only say 'a little replay value' because these level splits are few and far between – much of the time you'll be playing exactly the same stages. This is to be expected, as there's only so much variety you can achieve when two characters are supposed to follow the same story. However, the same can't be said about the actual gameplay in any of the third-person sections in the game. With the aim of each stage essentially being to get from A to B while taking out anything that gets in your way, things get rather tired all too quickly.

Initially, you'll be entering a room to find a group of enemies, beating them up and then moving onto the next chamber, where you'll do the same thing all over again until you reach the end of the stage. As things get tougher though, this turns into entering a room and retreating while being shot to pieces, then carefully creeping back into the room and picking off enemies before moving on – and so on. The trump card here is the array of bullet-time moves that can be performed while holding down the Focus button – everything goes into slow motion

"EXCEPTIONAL STORYTELLING AND THE ODD CLEVER IDEA ASIDE, ENTER THE MATRIX JUST ISN'T THE GAME THAT YOU'D EXPECT IT TO BE"



Niobe's a bit of a hard girl, even though she quite clearly has a haircut like a sprig of broccoli.



BREAKING THE CODE

The first time you see the title screen of the game, you'll notice that one of the options available to you besides playing the main game is Hacking. It's here that you can get into the innards of the game and mess around with all kinds of things once you get to grips with how it all works – seeing as it's just a very cut-down version of how a real PC operates, it's not that hard to pick up. Of course, it won't come as much of a surprise to learn that most of the content (including cheats, a training construct and other things we're not allowed to mention) is locked out with log-in names, passcodes and the like. To get those, you have to visit the game's two official Web sites and decipher their codes before returning to the game and 'hacking' into the system.

and you can kick arse, run up walls and dodge bullets with style for a limited time. These moves certainly look cool the first couple of times you use them (especially the hand-to-hand combat ones) but they don't have the kind of impact that they might have had if they hadn't been done before in a videogame. Even though it was the original *Matrix* movie that pretty much invented bullet-time, games like *Max Payne* and *BloodRayne* have already done it before.

But that's only the tip of the disappointment iceberg; delve past the repetitive action sections and you'll discover several pitiful driving segments that lack everything necessary in a good driving game, rendering them soulless and totally devoid of fun or excitement. Yet these are pure gameplay bliss when compared to the abominations that are the flying sections. Taking control of a hovership being chased by Sentinels might sound good, but it's not. They look awful (endless messy grey tunnels? No thanks), the controls are all over the place and, thanks to the fact that all you have to do is follow the arrows as fast as you can while firing at the Sentinels that just sit in front of your crosshair, the gameplay is practically non-existent. The worst thing is, they represent the final stages of the game and make it seem so anticlimactic you'll wonder if Shiny didn't have the time to code a proper ending.

Exceptional storytelling and the odd clever idea aside, *Enter The Matrix* just isn't the game that you'd expect it to be – unless you're as cynical as us, in which case it's everything you're expecting and more. Given the choice, we'd forget about deciding whether we're red or blue about *Enter The Matrix* and opt for indigo instead – a very deep shade of indigo, complete with the occasional fleck of inspiration and an incredibly thick vein of disappointment running throughout. What's worse is that our disdain for the game has nothing to do with the fact that it's a movie tie-in; in fact, it's the tie-in that actually helps bring it up from 'hideously sub-par' to just 'below average'. No, it's more because the only parts of the game that are even remotely playable turn out to be mind-numbingly repetitive after a short space of time; decent cut-scenes or not, these aren't the ingredients of a great title. Are we being overly harsh? Perhaps – but then to be frank, *Enter The Matrix* is less of the 'groundbreaking title' Infogrames claimed it would be and more, well, crap. We'd suggest renting it at best – and that's only if you're absolutely desperate to see what you're not missing.



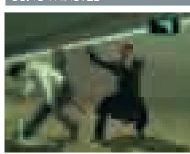
VERDICT 4/10
NICE FILM, SHAME ABOUT THE GAME

24:00 TIMELINE HIGHLIGHTS



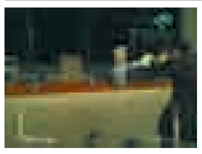
THE BEST BITS IN THE GAME AND WHEN YOU CAN EXPECT TO SEE THEM…

00:10 MINUTES



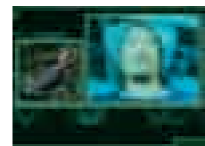
Having watched the opening movie and picked your character, you'll spend a few minutes getting used to the controls and playing with the fancy bullet-time effects.

03:00 HOURS



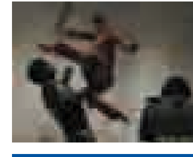
The wow factor of the slow-mo moves will have worn off by now, so you'll most likely be plugging through the game and discovering that it's quite tough (and even a little unfair).

2 DAYS



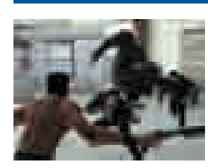
Playing solidly, you should have managed to finish the game with one character by now – but before starting the other, you should go and see the film first…

GAMECUBE £39.99 OUT NOW



Arriving on two separate discs, the GameCube receives a port of *ETM* straight from the PS2. The question is: why? We all know the GameCube can do better than this…

PS2 £39.99 OUT NOW



The lead format for the game, but also the worst-looking – it lacks the polish of the Xbox's visuals, simply because of the machine's power. As always though, control isn't an issue.

PC £34.99 OUT NOW



Not surprisingly, the PC version is just a straight port of the Xbox code and requires a fairly meaty machine to run well. Still, at least it looks better than the others.

SILENT HILL 3

DARE YOU RETURN TO THE FREAKIEST TOWN IN GAMING ONCE MORE?

DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Konami

DEVELOPER
In-house

PRICE
£39.99

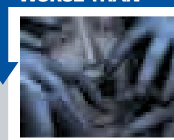
RELEASE
Out now

PLAYERS
1

BETTER THAN
ALONE IN THE DARK 4



WORSE THAN
PROJECT ZERO



For a horror game to succeed, it really needs to work on one of two levels – shock or psychology. *Resident Evil* and *Extermination* are two examples of the former, relying heavily on jumpy moments to keep the player on the edge of their seat. Psychological horror is rapidly becoming the new stealth, though, as shelves fill with the likes of *The Thing*, *Project Zero* and the previous *Silent Hill* offerings that aim to creep the player out with mind games. Arguably the most intense of the run-behind-the-sofa titles, the *Silent Hill* series consistently produces misshapen beasts, far-fetched themes and storylines that are almost in danger of making sense. They're not preying on obvious fears (*Resident Evil*'s giant snakes and spiders are pretty cheap shots), but rather creating new ones. A commendable feat indeed – after all, when was the last time something scared you even though you had no idea what the hell it was?

We've been stunned by *Silent Hill 3*'s very impressive visuals – we'd even go as far as to say Heather and her supporting cast of non-freaks are among the best rendered models we've seen. While darkened areas and extensive fogging may make impressive locales a little easier to produce, the last thing we want to do is detract from the great achievements of the development team; in context of the game's setting, the poor visibility and darkness are excusable, especially considering the incredible use of lighting and shadows. The animation only strengthens this visual lustre further – in fact, only the shaky camera (for effect, presumably) comes close to disrupting the appearance. Sound does an equally good job of setting an evil tone and complements the grotesque settings wonderfully. From random noises as you explore to tortured screams echoing down corridors, the effects and sporadic score are perhaps more unsettling than the lumbering piles of flesh that roam the streets and corridors.

Beneath the beautifully polished exterior, though, lies a familiar blend of darkness and running away. As usual, you'll find a distinct lack of ammunition for the few weapons you do get, leaving you to either beat the freaks to death or run for your life, but unlike many similar titles, control here is a simple affair. Between the bouts of monster evasion, you're asked to put your brain to work with a nice relaxing puzzle. At the start of the game, you select difficulty levels for action and riddles but even on the normal settings, enemies take a fair deal of punishment and your head is equally mistreated by some of the brainteasers. These riddles really are what sets this apart from the rest of the pack, as the *Silent Hill* series has

FAQs

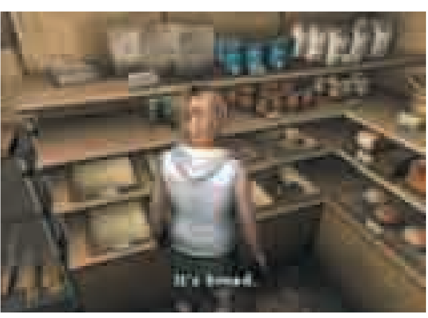
Q. HOW LONG IS IT?
Although you could finish it fairly quickly once you know where you're going, the ever-changing (and tricky) puzzles can stall you for any length of time.

Q. MULTIPLE ENDINGS?
It wouldn't be *Silent Hill* if there weren't. There are several endings depending on your actions en route.

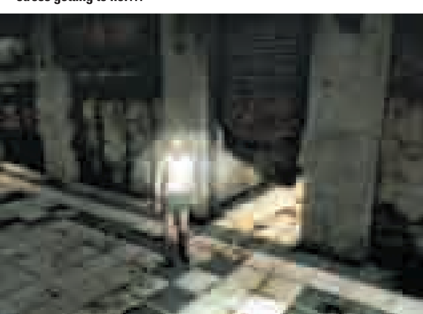
Q. ALL BLACK?
Not especially – you get the torch soon enough and there's also a surprising amount of light in the game.



You'll occasionally run into one of the few people who are still in town, although if, like this one, they look like they want to show you some puppies you might be better off running away (again).



I'm sorry, but that really isn't bread – it's blatantly cakes. Must be the stress getting to her…



A refreshing change. Where many other games might turn you away from this obvious gap, this one lets you through.



Heather isn't even safe from harm in a public restroom. Is there no end to the evil in Silent Hill?

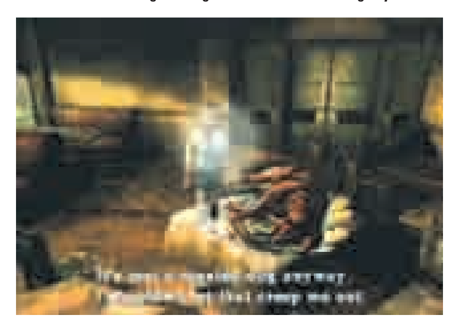
gamesTM ENHANCED

IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL

STUNNING: The improved visuals are easily some of the best on the machine, if not of this generation.

POLISH: Presentation feels more together; layout and voice acting both impress.

Proof, if it were needed, that a dog isn't just for Christmas – with any luck there'll be enough left to go in sandwiches on Boxing Day.



Even the people are overly dramatic and scary. Just another normal day in Silent Hill…



always prided itself on its ability to screw with your head before giving it a workout. You do have to wonder, though, if some of the puzzles would be easier if you weren't still thinking about misshapen dog creatures and bloodstained bunny suits…

However good or bad the rest of the game is, the level of frustration that accompanies the action puts a massive damper on things. Killing enemies gets frustrating, often involving endless circling and stabbing or shoot-run-shoot strategies. Finding the essential items is an annoyance too – progress often involves searching every darkened corner of every open room until you find a cryptic item that somehow opens that locked door further on. Even poking around the useful rooms is an unenviable chore to the point that the phrase 'The lock is broken' will induce more fear than the freakiest denizens of *Silent Hill* could ever hope to. The biggest saving grace comes by way of the aforementioned riddles, offering some truly intelligent puzzling to break up the action. These change every time you play (within a limited number of formations) so even when you come to play through a second or third time, there'll be that extra variety to keep your interest up on your way to the different endings.

Despite the high frustration level, it's hard not to be impressed with *Silent Hill 3*. Annoyances aside, there's still a mysterious allure to the game that keeps you playing. The plot is as confusing as ever and asks three questions for every one it answers, yet the infrequent interaction you get between Heather and the few other people left in town is enough to maintain interest between puzzles and freaks. It may have its faults but many of these are more through general survival horror problems than unique flaws. That's not to excuse this third outing from evolving around the familiar genre pitfalls, but the way things are headed we're going to need a revolutionary survival horror title to come along and shake up the genre pretty shortly. The last thing we want is for these games to slip into the blackness and be lost forever…



THE LOCK IS BROKEN

Ah, the classic survival horror excuses. Fans of the series will have seen countless locksmith nightmares in the two previous games, not to mention some other choice moments of stupidity. Our personal favourite came at the beginning of the second game, where the player isn't allowed to leave the first area without searching a car that 'might contain something useful'. Genius. This third outing is equally packed with annoying excuses to hamper your progress – a few hundred broken locks, several cardboard roadblocks and even an obstructed key that could be easily reached if Heather just put her bloody back into it. These really cheapen the experience for us, and even though we know *Silent Hill* is far from the only culprit in this great gaming crime, it seems to be the least ashamed of containing the player via ridiculous means. Now if she could just step over that pesky bunny suit…



No, we don't know what they are either. All we know is they waddle around eerily and die when stabbed repeatedly.

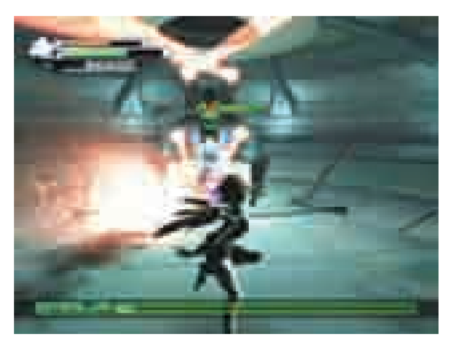


That'll come in handy for, er, hanging up clothes? No doubt you'll find some tenuous use for it.



VERDICT 6/10

FLAWED IN CRUCIAL AREAS, YET STRANGELY COMPELLING



Four huge laser cannons against one lady. We don't like those odds…

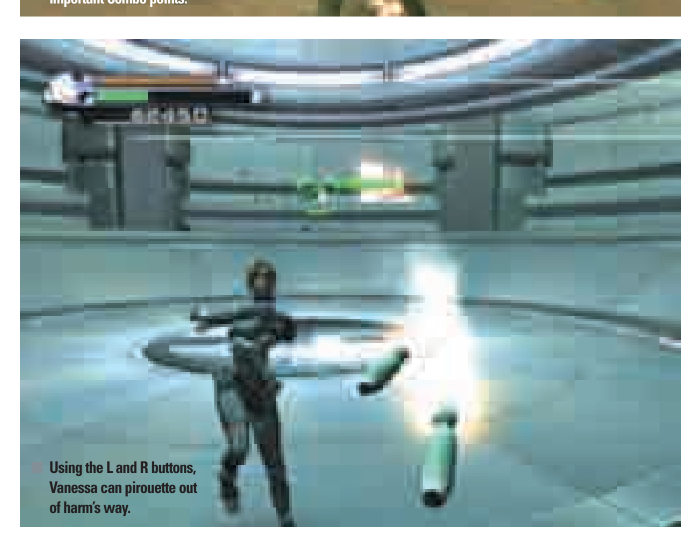




A single image that sums up the entire game – huge explosions and a worryingly supple femme fatale.



Finish off plenty of foes to rack up those all-important Combo points.



Using the L and R buttons, Vanessa can pirouette out of harm's way.

DON'T BELIEVE THE NUMBER – THIS IS AS ORIGINAL AS CAPCOM MAKE 'EM…

DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
GameCube

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Capcom

DEVELOPER
In-house

PRICE
£59.99 (Import)

RELEASE
29 August '03
(Japan: Out now)

PLAYERS
1

GUNGRAVE



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



GUNGAGE

P.N.03

Forget Lara Croft. Forget Dante. Forget Max Payne. In fact, forget everything you know to be true of 3D action games. This isn't a 'forget those, this is better' moment, though – these seemingly obvious points of comparison simply couldn't be further from *P.N.03*. This isn't what it looks like, and you'll find Capcom's new shooter takes its cues from old-school scrolling shoot-'em-ups far more than the 3D action adventure stable. This grants it all the benefits of a shooter (instant playability, plenty of replay value and an immediate no-frills experience) but at the same time opens the door to the ubiquitous drawbacks – a repetitive nature and a short lifespan among others. Like all genres, these shooters have their ups and downs but in the end it all comes down to execution. Can *P.N.03* really park in the space marked 'Reserved for *R-Type*'? Um, there might be space down the road somewhere…

Unless you're allergic to white (which, as far as we're aware, isn't medically possible), it's hard to find fault with *P.N.03*'s visuals. Animation is hands-down the strongest aspect of Capcom's latest offering; Vanessa Z. Schneider spins, dances and cartwheels with remarkable fluidity and the lighting effects that ensue from her destructive routines are simply superb. Perfectly complemented by an intense, pounding score, the non-stop action sounds every bit as good as it looks with a huge Dolby Surround soundtrack. There is a



A word of warning – robots aren't impressed by Vanessa's acrobatics and will carry on shooting regardless.

FINGERPRINT

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

GROOVY: Heroine Vanessa doesn't stop feeling the beat even for a moment.

FIRE AT WILL: Different suits all have their own special attacks and rates of fire to keep them unique.

The pyrotechnics on display are just as impressive as Vanessa's footwork.



FAQs

Q. DOES IT ALL LOOK THE SAME?
Not really. While there is a shocking amount of white in the game, it also has its complement of outdoor stages.

Q. ONLY TWO HOURS LONG?
'Fraid so. But with more skill settings and suits available on repeat plays, don't expect it to be done with quite that soon…

Q. EXTRAS?
Suits and modes galore to keep your interest, as well as a heroic new *Viewtiful Joe* trailer.



little too much repetition of environments for such a short game but when it's not attempting to confuse you with maze-like corridors, *P.N.03*'s settings can be downright awesome. A later rooftop stage proves this beyond doubt, showing miles of scenery all around – even when you venture inside, windows look out over a bustling metropolis. If only the whole game could have used more varied settings rather than the monochrome rooms and corridors that make up so much of this brief encounter.

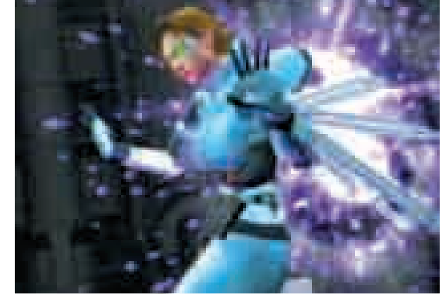
The control issue is an interesting one – for a game so heavily based around style and rhythm, controlling Vanessa is a little on the restrictive side. Her constant jiving really should have been more flowing, but character-relative controls with slow turn and retreat speeds can make the fast-paced action seem like a slow dance at times. Also curious is the synchronisation of her antics to the excellent soundtrack – or rather the lack of it. As the beats pound on, Vanessa keeps on grooving to her own beat. We'd really like to have seen some form of rhythm-action system implemented to blend the two together – either in a *Rez* style or through more traditional timed button presses – which would make much more sense than the existing system. Don't get us wrong, this is one of the most stylish GameCube titles to date, but through a little more integration of the music this could have been something truly stunning.

At last we come to the real bugbear of the game – *P.N.03* can be finished in under two hours. That's 120 minutes of practically solid action, mind you, and while the end of the game does creep up a little suddenly, it wouldn't take much additional play time for the game to lose its appeal. And since even Normal mode will trouble many gamers, expect to replay sections of the game several times in order to make progress – *P.N.03* is not an easy game by any standards. After a short time in control, you'll be leaping out of trouble and blasting with the best of them but however good you get, anything above the simplest difficulty should present some kind of challenge. Often it's boss battles that present these problems and these are particularly noteworthy – from fighting gigantic fixed cannons to heavily armed Transformers, you won't just breeze past these guys. Then there's the fact that you'll have to fight many of them twice…

P.N.03 is short, hard and frenetic but quite frankly it wouldn't work any other way. 'Could have been' is the one phrase we just can't get out of our heads and while we appreciate and enjoy what *P.N.03* is doing, any dancing fool can see the areas that let the package down. Be it repetition, simplicity or simply the fact that the overall product just doesn't feel as polished as it should, there are plenty of little things holding it back. Yet for all its faults *P.N.03* sill manages to be a curiously compelling title.

VERDICT 6/10
A CULT CLASSIC IN THE MAKING

Choosing your outfit is about more than this season's hottest colour…

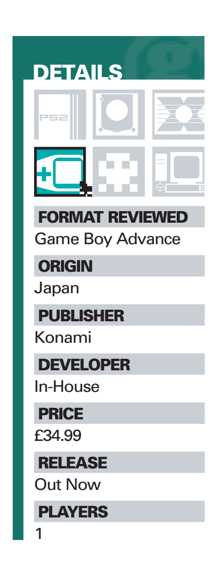


SUITED AND BOOTED

To match her impressive array of dancefloor-influenced athletics, Vanessa has a suitably extensive wardrobe of different Aegis Suits. On top of the different colour schemes, each of these can be upgraded to different parameters and features its own unique Energy Drive attacks for when the odds are stacked against you. These must be purchased and augmented through the mid-stage portals and between missions using points earned for showmanship, meaning you'll not only have a reason to show off, you'll actually need to in order to stay alive. In addition to the buyable outfits, there are several up for grabs by other means… These are well worth obtaining and you'll need to have your dancing shoes on to come anywhere close.

ANOTHER CLASSIC CASTLEVANIA, OR JUST A SHADOW OF ITS FORMER SELF?

CASTLEVANIA: ARIA OF SORROW



DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
Game Boy Advance

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Konami

DEVELOPER
In-House

PRICE
£34.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1

Flicking through this month's Retro section, it's not hard to see that we're avid fans of Konami's *Castlevania* series. Although just a handful of these *Dracula*-inspired titles can be labelled as classics, the fact that the series has lasted for 17 years goes to show that even the lower-quality releases display a certain level of polish. Fortunately, at the moment the 2D processing power of the Game Boy Advance is giving Konami the opportunity to continue the series in its original form, rather than switching to 3D once and for all. Even so, neither *Circle Of The Moon* nor *Harmony Of Dissonance* (the previous two GBA *Castlevania* games) have been able to match the grandeur of *Symphony Of The Night* on the PSone. Now with *Aria Of Sorrow*, however, that could all be about to change…

Employing a typically Japanese storyline that sees Soma Cruz (the main protagonist) and his friend Mina Habuka whisked off into the centre of a solar eclipse, the game immediately introduces the sort of magic and mystery that you'd hope for from a *Castlevania* title. The year is 2035, and it's been 36 years since Dracula's last appearance on Earth – predictably, the eclipse is significant in his return. Sadly, while the theme works well, the scripting is awful, particularly where the dialogue between Soma and the other characters is concerned. Thankfully, these scenes (which tend to be incredibly lengthy and really rather pointless) aren't that integral to progression and only crop up occasionally.

Scripting aside, just about every other aspect of *AOS* is realised to a high standard, with exceptional visuals for a GBA title. It's clear that Ayami Kojima (the *Castlevania* illustrator since *Symphony Of The Night*) has influenced the creative direction of the game – Soma's feminine appearance makes him look almost angelic, and the character portraits that appear during the cut-scenes are rather special. The animation is also surprisingly smooth, especially when compared to the other GBA *Castlevania* games. Soma moves elegantly as his flowing coat trails behind him, and with myriad dynamic attack patterns he's easily comparable to Alucard in *Symphony Of The Night* as far as design goes. As for the rest of the visuals, sprite rotation, enlargement and distortion techniques are used at every possible opportunity,

FAQs

Q. GOOD MUSIC?
Although the tunes aren't as good as in some *Castlevania* games, they're far better than those featured in *Harmony Of Dissonance*.

Q. GOOD CHARACTERS?
Well, they certainly look good. The problem is that the cardboard scripting means that they never really get a chance to develop.

Q. HOW LONG?
You can finish the game in less than five hours, though finding everything takes a hell of a lot longer.



■ You'll meet all sorts of extraordinary creatures along the way, each with their own strengths and weaknesses..



■ Learning attack patterns is important if you're to avoid taking damage. A big blade such as this can remove a fair portion of your health.



■ These giant clocks turn smoothly thanks to sprite rotation. This sort of imagery runs right through the *Castlevania* series.

SELLING YOUR SOUL

One of the most inventive new elements in *Aria Of Sorrow* is the introduction of Soul Powers – these take the place of the sub-weapons that previous games have featured and can be activated by pressing Up and B (providing you have enough magic power). Magic is once again collected in the form of Hearts that are left behind when an enemy or piece of scenery is destroyed and, although keeping your gauge topped-up is fairly easy most of the time, certain abilities can quickly drain it – especially during boss fights where Hearts are in short supply. Not surprisingly, finding every Soul in the game can take many hours of exploration. However, if any of your friends are also playing the game, you can link two GBAs together and trade abilities with each other, giving the game a *Pokémon*-like flavour.



Some of the enemies are huge. Big Golems are particularly impressive as each limb is animated separately, resulting in very smooth action.

gamesTM

FUSED

BRINGING GENRES TOGETHER

PLATFORM RPG: While the core mechanics are clearly that of a platform game, *AOS* includes RPG elements. It's really a case of selecting your weapon and magic then jumping over lots of gaps.



This being a *Castlevania* game, it's only fair to expect a few gothic monsters such as zombies and tetchy skeletons up for a fight.

Boss fights are some of the most difficult sections of the game, though most have weaknesses if you can figure out their attack patterns.

We're fairly sure Bram Stoker didn't have anything like this in mind, but *Aria Of Sorrow* creates an authentically creepy atmosphere.

enhancing the characters and scenery while creating a fusion of art and CG effects that would be impressive on any format, let alone the GBA. When you take the resolution and screen limitations into consideration, the overall effect that Konami has achieved is nothing short of amazing.

Of course, the most important factor of any game is the gameplay and, once again, *AOS* delivers the goods. Like *Symphony Of The Night*, progression is an organic process, with new sections of the castle becoming available as new power-ups are located. While Soma is initially limited to walking, jumping and slashing, items that enable walking on water, double jumping and gliding across wide gaps are awarded early on, with many other abilities becoming available later. But what makes *AOS* unique are the new Soul Powers – magical moves based on enemy attacks. There are 112 different enemies featured in the game, each with attacks that can be added to Soma's repertoire simply by destroying enough of them and possessing their souls. You can then use these against other enemies once they're activated, though their effectiveness varies depending on the strengths and weaknesses of each creature you face. The game also features a range of hidden weapons, costumes and accessories, each affecting your strength, constitution, intelligence and luck levels once found. Certain areas can actually be made far easier if you equip yourself with the right attire – a process that comes down to your experience with different enemies and areas.

Like Nintendo's *Metroid* games, progression through *Aria Of Sorrow* is a time-consuming affair that requires stamina if you're to reach the end. It's not that it's a particularly difficult game to complete, but the steady pacing and constant RPG-style levelling up, combined with a maze of tricky-to-navigate castle corridors makes for a compelling, but at times daunting, experience. If you played through *Castlevania: Symphony Of The Night*, or are the sort of gamer who enjoys building up stats and organising equipment, *AOS* will give you a few hours of quality handheld fun. If, however, you're expecting a straightforward platform adventure game along the lines of SNES *Castlevania IV*, you may find the whole experience a little confusing. Either way, this is easily the second greatest game in the *Castlevania* series, only trailing just behind *Symphony Of The Night* in terms of scale, depth and innovative design.

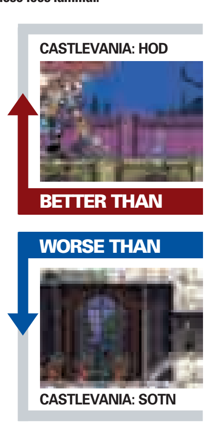


VERDICT 8/10

THE SECOND BEST GAME IN THE CASTLEVANIA SERIES



Ancient gamers who remember the flying Medusa heads from the original NES *Castlevania* may find these foes familiar.







WHO SAID THE JAPANESE WERE A WEIRD, TWISTED BUNCH OF PEOPLE, EH?

CLOCK TOWER 3

games™ FINGERPRINT

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

SICKO: For a 15-rated game, *Clock Tower 3* is incredibly nasty – watching a girl getting her skull smashed with a hammer or an old lady being shoved into a barrel of acid is a little excessive, even for us…

DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Capcom

DEVELOPER
In-house

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
27 June '03
(Japan/US: Out now)

PLAYERS
1

While the concept of survival horror is nothing new to gamers in the West, the *Clock Tower* series has never really done that well over here. Maybe it was the disappointing graphics, muddled control method or all-round lack of gameplay – whatever, it bombed. So Capcom is looking to change that with the release of *Clock Tower 3*. Sure, it might carry on the tradition of 'schoolgirl in uniform, tortured by evil souls' from the last two games, but Capcom has tried to take a different angle with the latest instalment…

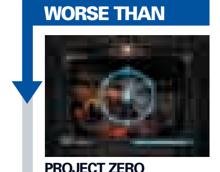
Lying somewhere between the 'leap out of your chair' frights of *Resident Evil* and the unsettling air of *Project Zero*, you'll always be on edge as you guide lead character Alyssa through *Clock Tower 3* – mainly because there's almost always someone right behind you trying to slice you in two, melt you with acid or smash your skull with a giant mallet. Defeating these demonic killers is the ultimate aim, although you'll have to solve plenty of puzzles first – usually of the rather obvious 'find item here, use item there' variety. Then there's another catch. As well as only having a bottle of Holy Water to fend off foes, Alyssa is prone to panic attacks; if she gets scared enough to fill up her Panic Meter, she'll turn into a flailing idiot and run the risk of getting slaughtered. It's a good idea and one that certainly adds value to the game's atmosphere.

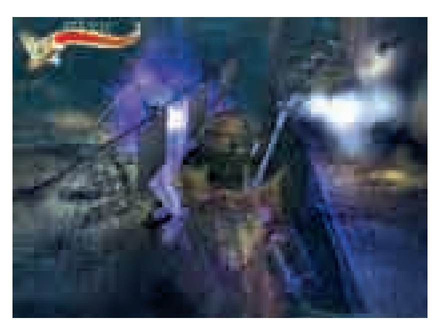
Sadly, the gameplay suffers from some duff execution in places. Although the change from point 'n' click controls to a more *Devil May Cry*-style system is welcome, controlling Alyssa isn't that easy thanks to the over-eager camera that flicks between set angles. The simplistic nature of the puzzles doesn't help either, as it turns the game into a case of running to and fro as fast as you can rather than anything requiring proper skill. It's a shame really, as even with all these problems *Clock Tower 3* is far superior to its predecessors in every way. We just doubt that anyone but the most hard-core survival horror fan will notice…

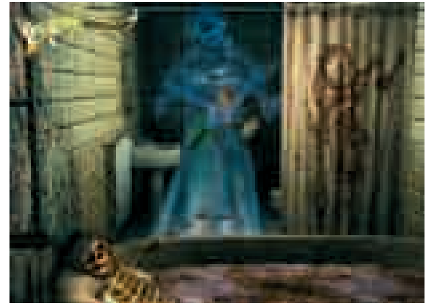
VERDICT 6/10
FLAWED, BUT NOT WITHOUT ITS MOMENTS

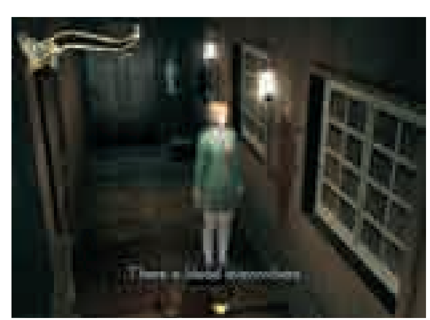
ILLBLEED

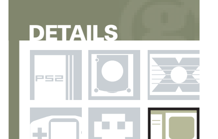
BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN

PROJECT ZERO


The serial killers you'll meet are all rather nasty – and some, like the Corroder, are actually based on real-life murderers. Charmed, I'm sure.


Sending the ghosts that block your way into the netherworld is much more appealing than having one wrapped around your head…


We're not claiming to be rocket scientists or anything, but most of the puzzles in the game take about two minutes to work out.



DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
PC

ORIGIN
Germany

PUBLISHER
JoWood

DEVELOPER
In-House

PRICE
£19.99

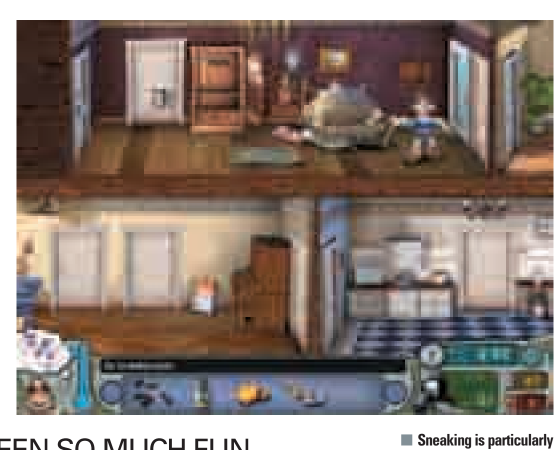
RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1

MINIMUM SPEC
166 MHz Pentium processor, 64MB RAM, 130MB free hard disc space, 4x CD-ROM drive, 16MB DirectX 8-compatible graphics card

NEIGHBOURS FROM HELL





Sneaking is particularly important when trying to get past dozing animals or even snoozing neighbours.

MAKING SOMEONE ANGRY HAS NEVER BEEN SO MUCH FUN…

Ever played *Secret Of Monkey Island*, *Day Of The Tentacle* or *Sam And Max Hit The Road*? Then you'll love *Neighbours From Hell*. Really, you will. Okay, so it's not exactly a sprawling adventure game in the same vein as the LucasArts classics, but it's the closest you're going to get until George's firm bothers to release the sequels it's been promising for so long. Set over 14 different 'episodes', *NFH* places you as Woody, the star of a new TV show called (funnily enough) *Neighbours From Hell* – imagine *You've Been Framed* meets *Home Alone*, but with more sadism. By using various items hidden around the house, the idea is to lay traps and hurt Woody's neighbour in as many ways as possible, making him furious and boosting your viewing figures.

However, working out where you have to use each item to set a trap is just the tip of the iceberg. Seeing as you have to set the traps ahead of the neighbour, you'll have to keep out of his way while you do it – he'll have a different routine in each episode, with the dream bubble in the bottom of the screen telling you what he's up to if you can't actually see. Obviously, crossing paths with him will result in him beating you up (a big no-no), but you'll also have to use Woody's special 'sneak' move to get past the neighbour's pets and prevent them raising the alarm. What's more, the trick isn't just to play pranks but to string them together to keep the neighbour angry; start filling his Anger Meter and the bonus points will roll in.

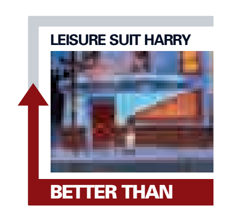
Unfortunately, there's a catch – while figuring out what to do, laying traps and then watching your neighbour get hurt in so many ways (including being burnt, electrocuted, tied in knots and even covered in bees) is a great laugh, there just isn't enough of it. Admittedly, the budget price goes some way to alleviating this but the 14 episodes are still over too quickly, especially if you're good at puzzle games. However, it's a minor gripe when you think how much fun you'll have while you're playing, which is the whole point of gaming in the first place. We just hope JoWood develops an add-on disc some time soon…

games™ FINGERPRINT
WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE
TRAP DOOR: There have been trap-based games before, but not one that was meant to be funny.
BARGAIN: At only £19.99, *NFH* is perfect for casual gamers – you don't even need a good PC.



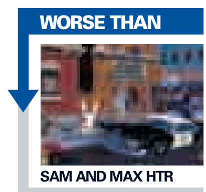
Some of the tricks are typical *Carry On* comedy… but they're still damn funny all the same.

LEISURE SUIT HARRY



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



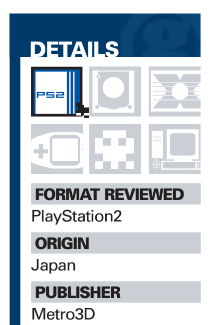
SAM AND MAX HTR

VERDICT 7/10
TOO SHORT, BUT WHAT'S THERE IS COMEDY GOLD

SUIT UP, BOY – IT'S TIME TO GET THAT MECHA A-RUNNIN'…

ARMORED CORE 3

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Metro3D

DEVELOPER
From Software

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
Out now

PLAYERS
1-4

If you can remember way back when the PlayStation2 was first released, you may recall the dearth of games that came with it – and some who like to torture themselves may even remember *Armored Core 2*. In short, it was a travesty of mecha gaming; terribly slow, with a disgustingly imbalanced parts system. Admittedly, some of these issues were tweaked in *Armored Core 2 Another Age* but the fundamental structure was still fatally flawed. To anyone who had actually played the original PlayStation games (probably very few of you) the PlayStation2 'sequels' would have made you weep big man tears. Thankfully, none of this matters now.

Appearing as a standalone title from previous PlayStation2 incarnations, *Armored Core 3* is very much a regression, in terms of gameplay, to the halcyon days of the series. Set in a dystopian future, the player controls an armored core (or AC for short) – a fully customisable mechanical avatar. Playing as a mercenary called a Raven, you basically accept missions from whoever will pay you; after all, the underground city of Layered is by no means a tranquil place. The main focus of the series has always been on progressing through the missions and arenas and then buying parts with the cash you earn. It's power gaming in its purest form. However, as many will know, power gaming is rife with difficulties. In the case of *Armored Core*, some parts have to be more powerful than others so that a real sense of progression can be noticed by the player; this can lead (as it has in the past) to the unbalancing of parts in the Versus aspect of the game. This time though, the designers have been particularly shrewd and created a parts list with very little redundancy.

Gone are the joke energy weapons, such as the Karasawa Mk2 – the Karasawa is still present, but thankfully balanced. Instead of merely having more powerful parts that eclipse others, the set-up now consists of parts that, on their own, cannot achieve a sufficient kill. Admittedly the machine guns are very powerful, but they require skill to keep the shots on target, and even then they're still unable to take out most heavily armed foes alone. Instead, they require the tandem use of other weapons in order to bring your opponent down. It's also worth mentioning the new Exceed Orbit cores. Activated in the same way as *Armored Core 2*'s Overboost (which is still present), these drones automatically target enemies and even regenerate ammunition, but at the downside of sapping your generator capacity. This overall offensive management adds a diversity and vibrancy to the already very solid combat.

Another interesting and tactical feature that has been added to the series is that of being able to drop and pick up weapons mid-game, to the extent

FAQs

Q. CAN I USE MY ARMORED CORE 2'S SAVE DATA?
No, you can't. But then this is a good thing (no Karasawa Mk2, thank God).

Q. CAN I PLAY ONLINE?
That depends. Are you in Japan? Then yes. Otherwise, you're pretty much stuffed.

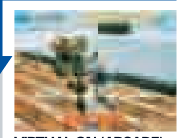
Q. CAN I PLAY AS OPTIMUS PRIME?
Sadly not. But you could probably build your own if you wanted.

PHANTOM CRASH



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



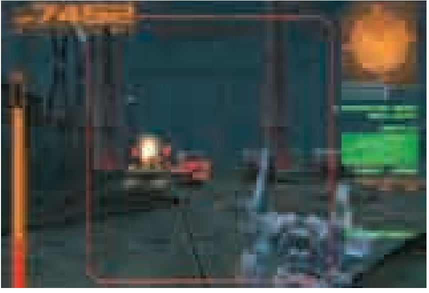
VIRTUAL ON (ARCADE)



Upgrading your mecha's abilities is paramount to your success as you plough through the missions – changing weaponry, armour and even body parts is the only way to ensure that your mecha will be able to deal with the ordeals ahead. That, and giving it a good wax polish every now and again.

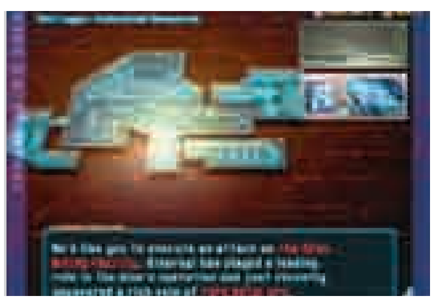


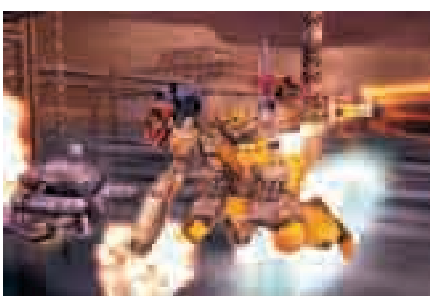
A big mecha with an even bigger gun. Although melee weapons are handy, a powerful firearm can be your best friend in a clinch.



The automatic lock-on only works when you're facing your enemy, so don't expect any easy kills as you try to run away in a blind panic.


Mmm, homing missiles. Why bother aiming when you can use these rather powerful little beauties?





that it's possible to drop a heavy weapon only to have your opponent pick it up and, consequently, slow him down. Superb. In lieu of this reduced firepower though, the player can now take Consorts on some of the missions. Varying from other ranking AC's to fighter jets, they add welcome support in many situations. This is also supplemented by the addition of the increased Versus capacity. *Armored Core 3* is now four-player. Set over two game types – Team Battle and Battle Royale – the Versus aspect of the game is particularly hectic. In Team Battle, the main goal is to destroy the opposing team's leader (a system not that dissimilar to Hitmaker's somewhat flawed *Virtual On Force*), and produces a surprising resolve in teamwork. As for Battle Royale… well, it's just a plain excess of carnage.

The series has been improved on the graphical side too. The draw distance that plagued the earlier PlayStation2 games has gone, so has the abysmal slowdown. Instead, we now have a high-speed action game with panoramic clarity. Along with suitably gritty design work from mecha designer extraordinaire, Kawamori Shouji, *Armored Core 3* is an aesthetically accomplished title. *Armored Core 3* also uses Dolby Pro Logic II Surround particularly well, and gives a nice sense of aural immersion that the games have always needed. Unfortunately, the sad fact is that *Armored Core* has never really received the recognition it deserves in the West. Whether it's the brutal learning curve of each game (including this one), the controls that require perseverance to master or just a lack of appreciation for mecha gaming, it's a situation that should be rectified with this release. *Armored Core 3* may be a sequel, and hence derivative, but it's still a very well-crafted game. Let's hope it's appreciated as such.



THE GRAN TURISMO OF MECHA GAMES



BIT PART PLAYER

In the original games, there were two sets of in-game cheats the player could utilise; one offered contextual improvements to your AC's performance (firing back-mounted cannons while moving, for instance) and the other allowed you to disregard the strict weight limitations. To acquire these attributes you had to get into debt and then undergo a mission – basically, you would fail and get rewarded. In *Armored Core 3*, however, all this has been changed. Upon completion of the missions you will be given an option part called Op-Intensify. This part uses all your option slots and has to be trained so you can use its attributes – you have to earn the reward this time round. The weight limit is still present too, but you can now overload your AC to the detriment of moving speed. In short, *Armored Core 3* forces the player to appreciate the brilliance of its intricate parts system.

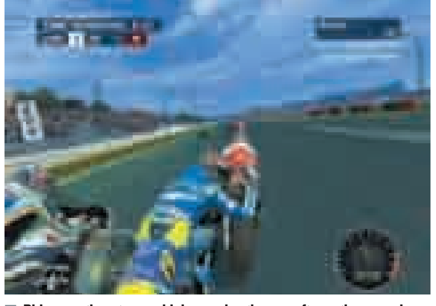

Some of the earlier enemies can be avoided by simply hiding behind the scenery and pretending that you're not there. No, only joking.


Multiplayer action is where it's at – unfortunately, the online play has been taken out of the UK release. Damn their eyes.

■ C'mon, that's just showing off. Saying that, Stunt mode rewards you with extra points for this kind of showboating so you can justify those hours spent practising your wheelies.







■ Rider reactions to your high speed antics are often rather amusing, like with this dissatisfied customer.

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
Xbox

OTHER FORMATS
PC

ORIGIN
UK

PUBLISHER
Microsoft

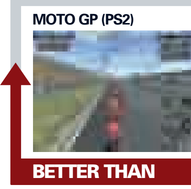
DEVELOPER
Climax

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
Out now

PLAYERS
1-4 (2-20 on Live)

MOTO GP (PS2)



BETTER THAN

AS GOOD AS...

MOTO GP (XBOX)

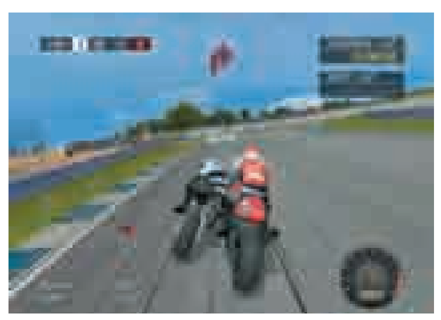
MOTO GP 2

THE XBOX LIVE FAVOURITE GETS UPDATED BUT DOES IT REALLY NEED IT?

Within the constraints of two-wheeled vehicles speeding around designated circuits, there really isn't all that much room for artistic licence. Throw in real people and locations and the leeway becomes marginal at best. Such is the problem faced by the *Moto GP* games. Like Formula 1, team line-ups and visited courses rarely change, meaning regular updates can feel frustratingly similar. Short of decreasing the frequency of these titles (developers wouldn't like that) or being creative with the events and modes, there's not a lot more we can expect. But while it may seem like we've seen it all before (mainly because we pretty much have), as a standalone game *Moto GP 2* is a very respectable effort.

Tracks, riders, unlockables – everything in the game feels horribly familiar from the off. Short of a few additional challenges, many of the modes and even the cheats are straight out of the first game. On closer inspection, there are actually six new tracks in addition to those we raced last season and a few different riders. Nothing huge, sure, but enough to make for a little more variety in single and multiplayer modes. As you'd imagine, every track, bike and set of leathers is modelled faithfully on their real-life counterparts and they don't disappoint when it comes to mimicking the motor sport as closely as we've ever seen on a console.

With the Xbox's wonderful ability to use custom soundtracks, there's always the danger of developers getting complacent with the tunes they provide. It's unclear whether this is the case or whether Climax thought a mediocre dirge-rock soundtrack would genuinely complement the



■ Aggressive riding at its best. Don't try this at home, kids…



■ Fans of the sport will love the realism of tracks and riders.

FAQs

Q. GAME MODES?
Quick Race, Career, Stunt and Time Trial. Outside online play, Career is the only mode with more than a couple of hours to it.

Q. SPLIT SCREEN?
Up to four players can go at it on a single Xbox and the quality and speed is great – it's like Live never happened. Sort of.

Q. WORTH UPGRADING?
It may sound harsh but probably not. This sequel is a great starting point for newcomers but may cause a little déjà vu elsewhere.



Our rider shows the world just why helmets are a good idea. Happy landing, fella…

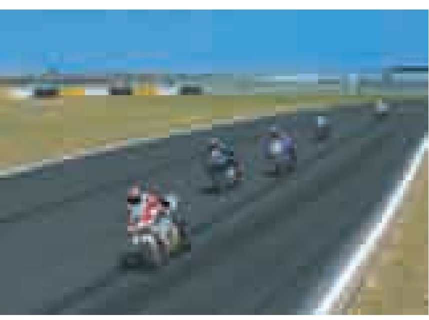
ENHANCED

games™

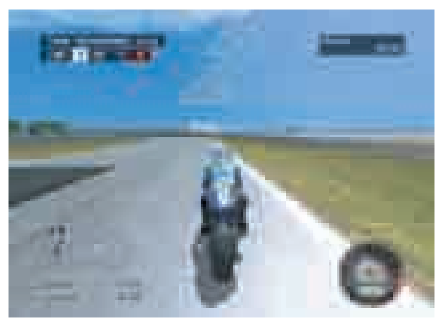
IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL

SHINY: Effects and models have come on a little since we began two-wheeling last year.

QUANTITY: More tracks and riders are available than in the previous game.



Replays are once again impressive, offering a slew of angles from which to enjoy your success.



Arcade mode throws the mandatory checkpoint time limit into the equation to make it that little bit tougher.

game – either way, this isn't the game's strongest area and lets down the other decent audio elements. Once you've muted the sound or ripped your own playlist, you'll be better able to appreciate the finer things in the game. The visuals and sense of speed are particularly impressive – wet courses shimmer beautifully, heated tyres send up plumes of smoke and weather effects like heat hazes and rain showers make concentration suitably difficult.

Unsurprisingly, gameplay is as good as ever. The 'if it ain't broke' attitude can usually be dismissed as laziness, but in this case why change a good system? The precision control you have over the bike feels solid and responsive and the various challenges and modes will lead you from rookie status to podium glory in a relatively straightforward fashion. There's also the small matter of the Sim level – a slider can be set to whatever percentage you choose and reflects how realistic (read: unforgiving) the game is. A wonderful idea in theory, but the change in handling isn't all that dramatic – the main change seems to be an increasing inability to stay on the bike as you slide the bar towards full Simulation. This makes for an excellent challenge and although it's not really what we'd call simulation, it's a lot closer than much of the competition can boast.

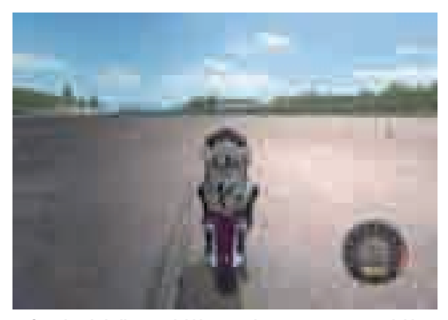
Of course, one of the game's main selling points is its full Xbox Live support. As you'd expect, this is every bit as good as its predecessor. It's a bit of a shame there isn't more to it than just course racing, though – as good as it may be after a few races, the novelty can wear somewhat thin (not to mention being sworn at by the cocky 12-year-old in the lead). That said, it's oh-so-apparent that Climax knows its way around Live, offering *Moto GP 2* players everything associated with the online community such as network gaming, live conversation and even voice masking.

Ultimately, a lot depends on whether you own the first *Moto GP*. With so few major changes, we can't recommend forking out a second time for what is effectively more of the same – perhaps *Moto GP 1.5* would have been a more accurate title. A sequel should take the strengths of the original product and refine them into a superior game, not take the strengths of the original product and put them in a different box. After the feature-filled *Moto GP 3* from Namco, we were hoping for a suitably packed reply from Climax, but rather than impress with the sheer amount on offer, *Moto GP 2* impresses through pure solidity. This may be fine for now, but we just hope Live support doesn't become a substitute for standalone longevity.



LOOK MA, I'M FAMOUS

Career mode may not be as deep or as comprehensive as those seen in many more niche racers but it certainly fulfils its purpose with aplomb while remaining accessible. Starting with your own created rider on a bike of your choice, you'll be required to work your way up through Grands Prix and challenges to earn championship points and experience to improve your skills. This is the only mode outside of Live play with any substantial lifespan and just winning a season will be hard enough, let alone maxing out your rider or unlocking all the extra features hidden within. Start playing with skill settings and Sim levels and the potential is greater still…



Completed challenges yield bonus points to turn your created rider into a superstar of the circuit.



Thanks to the Xbox hard drive, you can save as many replays as you choose with which to bore your friends at a later date.



VERDICT 7/10

OVERFAMILIARITY MARS AN ACCOMPLISHED TITLE

FUSED

BRINGING GENRES TOGETHER

WRESTLEFEST: Okay, okay, *Def Jam Vendetta* does owe a few nods to the world of wrestling.

TO DA STREET: Like *NBA Street 2*, *Def Jam Vendetta* has a streetwise look and sound.



You can do even more damage outside the ring; especially if you dive over the top rope onto your opponents.



Some of the move names are a little disturbing – attempted murder, anyone? We'll pass on that one, thanks.

DEF JAM VENDETTA

IT'S A WRESTLING GAME FOR PEOPLE WHO HATE WRESTLING

DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

OTHER FORMATS
GameCube

ORIGIN
Canada

PUBLISHER
EA Sports BIG

DEVELOPER
Aki Corp/EA Sports

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
23 May (US: Out now)

PLAYERS
1-4

Wrestling may be a a dubious sport but that doesn't mean all wrestling games are rubbish. Indeed, *WWF Wrestlemania 2000* and *WWF No Mercy* on the N64, or the recent *Kinniku Man II* on the GameCube were all great fun to play, even if they did have too much lycra in them. But then, maybe this is where wrestling games have been going wrong – trying to relate the games to 'real' wrestling is usually what turns people off. That's why we're impressed to see that *Def Jam Vendetta* does what no other wrestling-based game has done before and makes the art of grappling appeal to a more mainstream audience.

You can kiss goodbye to the elaborate entrances and ridiculous costumes, but the bone-crunching action and over-the-top finishing moves remain intact, albeit with a distinctly 'street' flavour. Set in the underground locales where you'd normally expect to find illegal fight clubs, EA Sports BIG has done a good job of capturing the atmosphere that you'd expect from this type of location thanks to its previous experience with the *NBA Street* series. Each of the 45-plus characters in the game has their own look, personality and 'in-your-face' taunts which, when combined with the licensed soundtrack from Def Jam artists such as DMX and Ludacris and the numerous locations in the game, really help create the attitude that a game like this needs.

The gameplay is also top-notch, mainly thanks to the tried-and-tested fighting engine provided by Aki Corp. This helps create a game that's superior to anything THQ has produced since dropping Aki in favour of Yukes; it's fast without being too arcadey and has enough variety of moves to keep each match interesting. Even better, *Def Jam Vendetta* is a challenging game with enough unlockable goodies to keep you coming back for a long time – and that's before you even think about playing against your friends. This title is well worth a look, even if you've never been a fan of grown men fondling each other in the ring.

VERDICT 7/10

WRESTLING WITHOUT THE LYCRA – AND IT'S FUN TOO

There are over 45 fighters to choose from, including five ladies and 12 rap stars.

WU-TANG: TTP



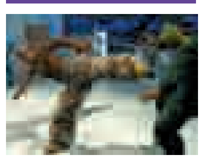
BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN

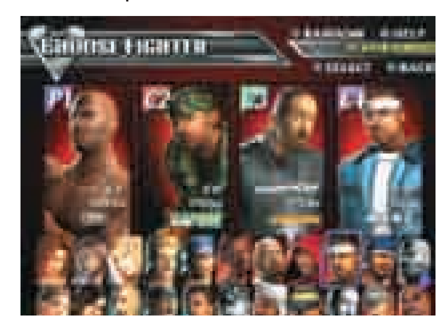


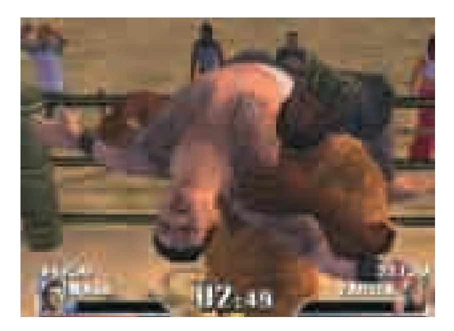
KINNIKU MAN II

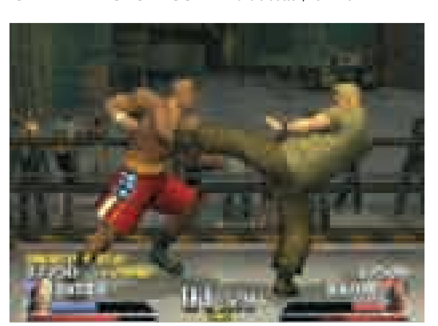
GC £39.99 OUT NOW



The GameCube version of *Def Jam Vendetta* is practically identical to the PlayStation2 one. This is both a good thing (because the game is lots of fun and the gameplay didn't need tweaking) and a bad thing (as it could have looked a bit better). Oh well…



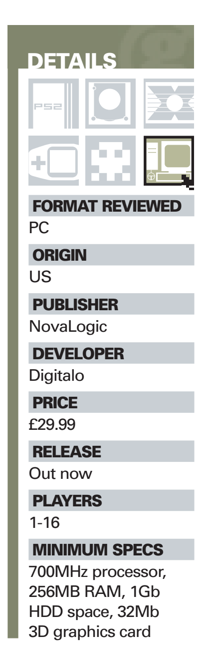




DEVASTATION



CLEANING UP THIS TOWN IS GOING TO BE ONE HELL OF A JOB



FORMAT REVIEWED
PC

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
NovaLogic

DEVELOPER
Digitalo

PRICE
£29.99

RELEASE
Out now

PLAYERS
1-16

MINIMUM SPECS
700MHz processor, 256MB RAM, 1Gb HDD space, 32Mb 3D graphics card

If there's anything more in fashion with games developers at the moment than cel-shading it has to be the inclusion of a realistic physics engine, and *Devastation* seems to go out of its way to emphasise that it certainly isn't without this season's must-have accessory. Since the devastated world in which the game's events unfold clearly hasn't seen a garbage collection day for a good few years, environments are literally littered with an obscene number of interactive objects to fully parade the capabilities of the MathEngine Karma physics system. The combination of object physics and rag-doll death animations makes for some moments of cinematic brilliance as your slain enemies are sent sprawling into the scenery, but the surprising regularity of glitches with the engine sadly frustrates as often as it impresses.

While the much-hyped physics system is way too flawed to succeed in setting *Devastation* apart from the crowd, as a run-of-the-mill FPS the game proves itself to be a pretty solid all-rounder, capable of holding its own against some of the better examples in the genre. Everything you could want from an action-packed shooter is here, from the varied collection of over 30 weapons to a 'lite' squad-based element that enables you to issue one of four basic commands to your small band of followers. All of this is made wonderfully accessible to even the most novice gamer, and offers more experienced players a game they can pick up for a quick blast without having to invest too much thought.

Perhaps most notable is the undeniable beauty of the surroundings in which all of this takes place. The backdrops of a bleak Earth in the not too distant future are graphically stunning, and the incessant mounds of trash are as attractive as a pile of rubbish has ever been. Even the beefier PCs will tend to groan under the weight of such graphical detail and complex object physics when the action really starts to kick off. The appealing setting and standard gameplay features also provide strong foundations for the online multiplayer experience, which again doesn't break any new ground but is without doubt a vastly entertaining affair. Although there's certainly nothing special here, *Devastation* does enough to stand out above the more average contenders in its class. Those wanting to add a decent action shooter to their collection could do a heck of a lot worse.

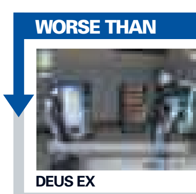
VERDICT 7/10
ABOVE AVERAGE SHOOTER WITH IMPRESSIVE VISUALS

DIE HARD: VENDETTA

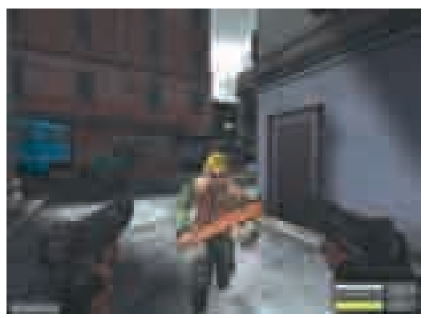


BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



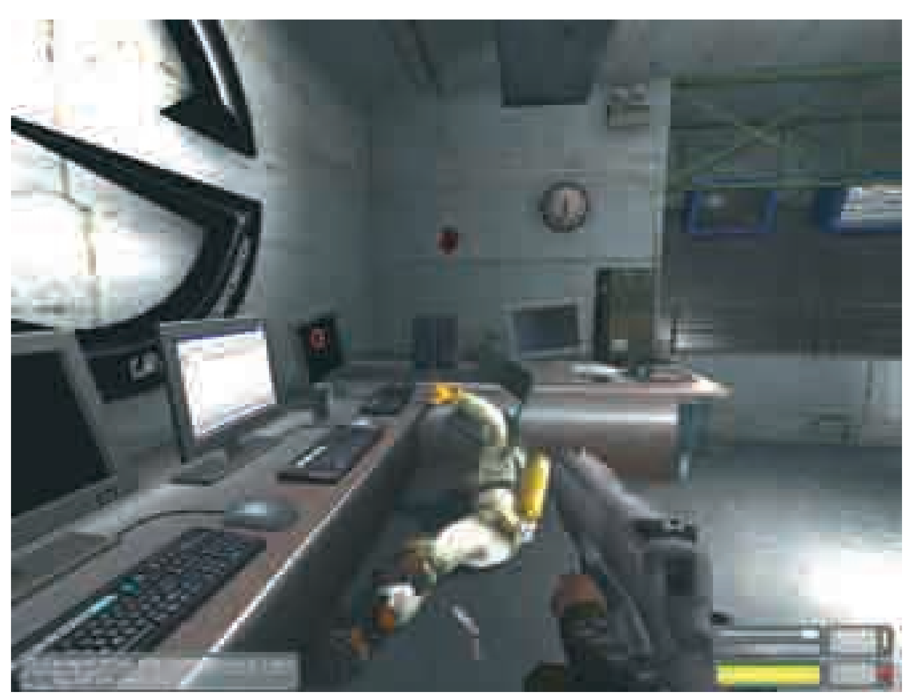
DEUS EX



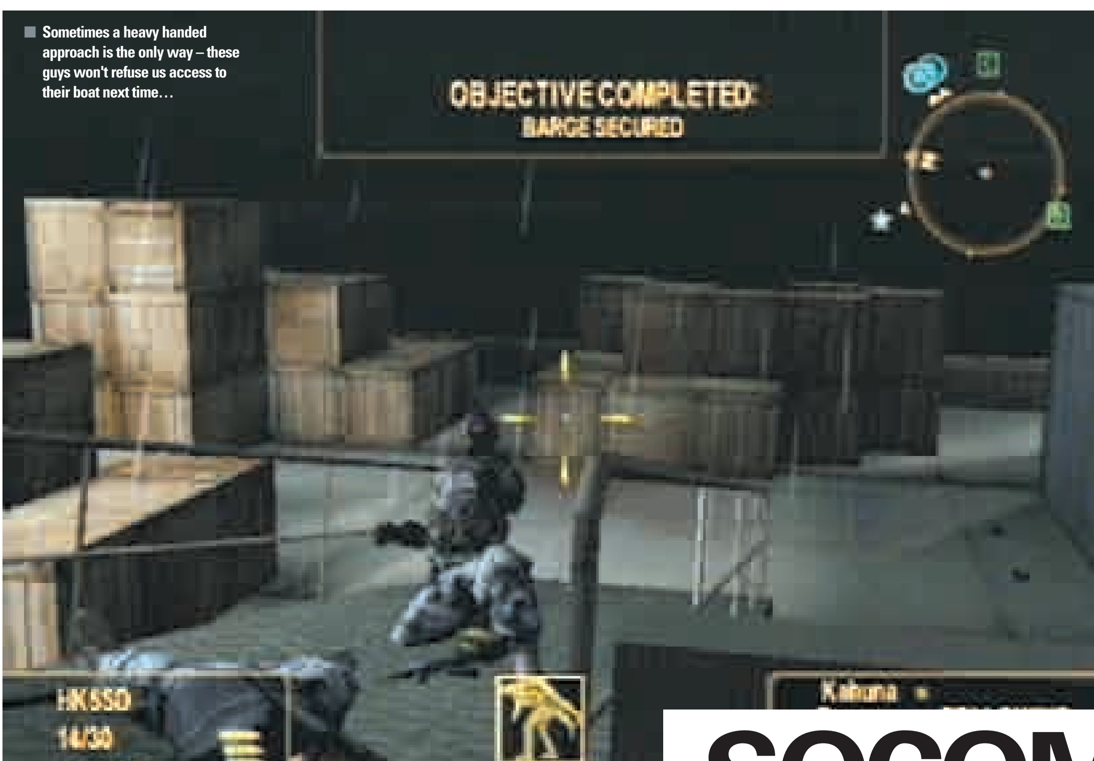
The scenery is cluttered with bottles and lengths of 2x4 that can be used as weapons, but its much more advisable to stick to your guns.



Stealthily sneaking up on your adversaries takes a great deal of care, as clumsily disturbing a piece of garbage will alert the razor-sharp AI.



The physics engine can become annoying at times, but watching your enemy crash into his chair after the perfect headshot makes it all worthwhile.



Sometimes a heavy handed approach is the only way – these guys won't refuse us access to their boat next time…

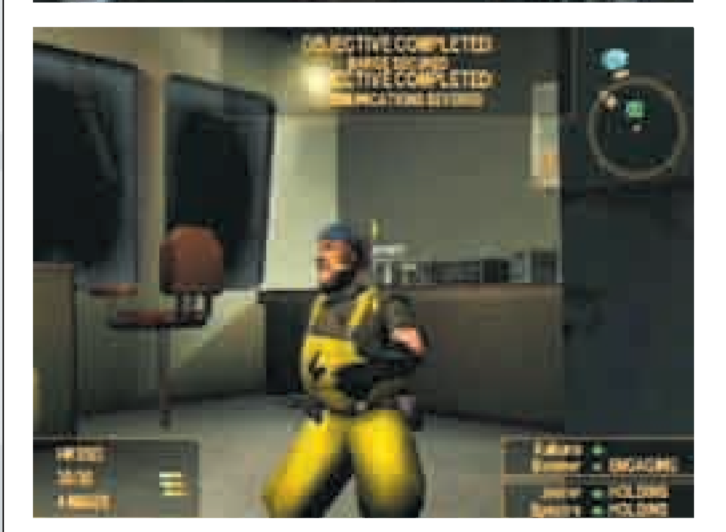
FAQs

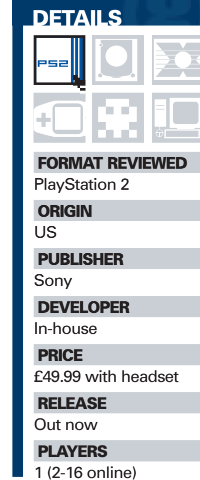
Q. HOW MANY PLAYERS?
Up to 16 online. It's enough for decent-sized teams without risking the massive slowdown of a larger scale battle.

Q. IS THE HEADSET ESSENTIAL?
In theory, no, but in practice there will be times when you need to be moving, shooting and issuing orders at the same time.

Q. SINGLE OR MULTIPLAYER?
The game benefits from both, but we'd say multiplayer just takes it by being more diverse and enjoyable.

SOCOM: US





DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation 2

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
Sony

DEVELOPER
In-house

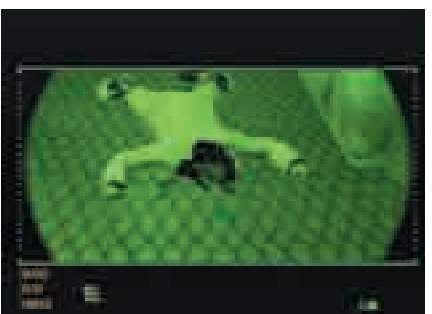
PRICE
£49.99 with headset

RELEASE
Out now

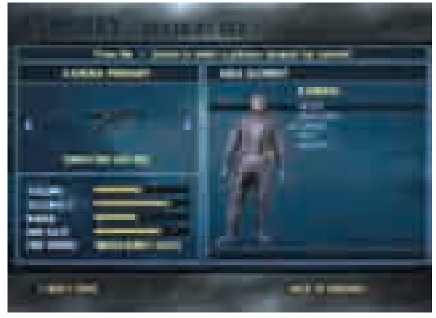
PLAYERS
1 (2-16 online)

Considering the genuinely scary following *Counter-Strike* has forged amongst PC gamers, it's a small miracle that no squad-based title has had a similar impact on the console market. Most of the blame for this can be attributed to consoles lacking online support (until recently, of course), with the epic conflicts of network gaming impossible to faithfully recreate through either split-screen or AI. Today, at the birth of the console online revolution (the Dreamcast's sluggish 33k modem was obsolete even at launch) we now have a level playing field on which the networked duellists can compete. This PS2 pioneer has one of the big guns of PC online gaming in its sights but who'll score the first (and only) headshot?

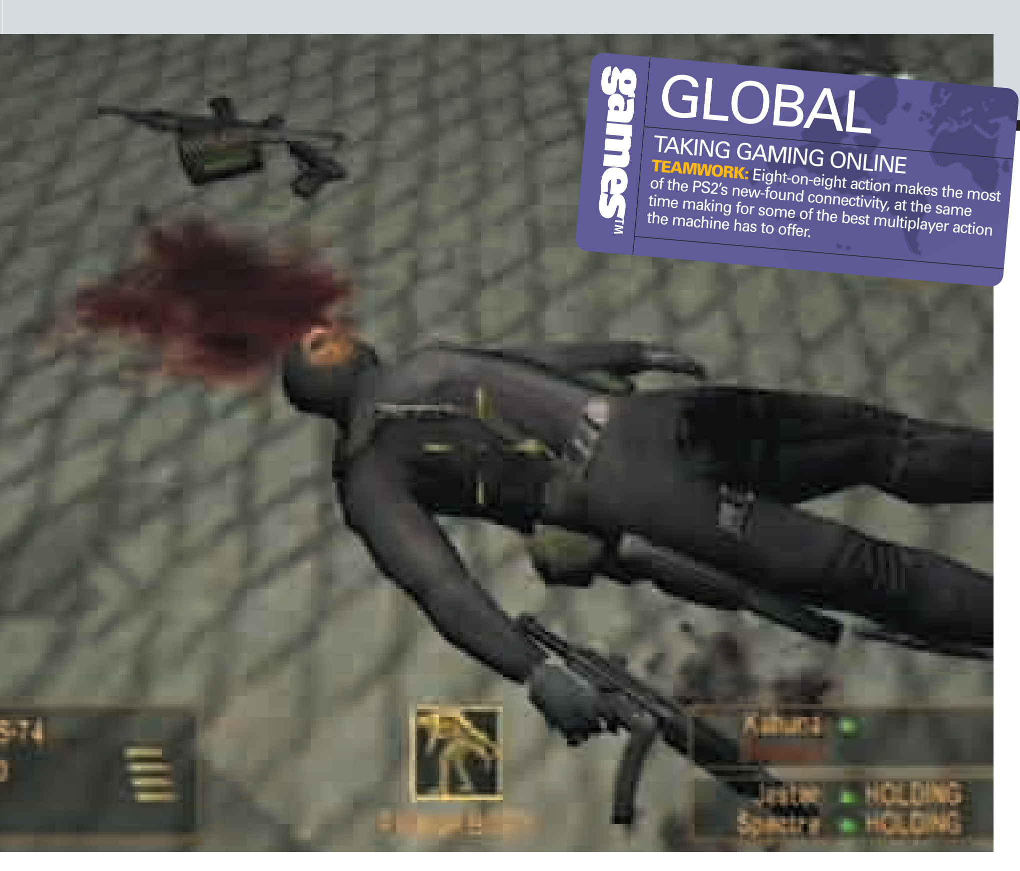
SOCOM drops you into the boots of an elite soldier armed to the teeth, and while you only control a single operative, you'll have three others at your disposal through voice commands and orders. Before undergoing one of the game's missions, you're able to pick your supplies and firearms from an impressive array of real weaponry to ensure your squad is prepared for the worst. The assignments themselves cover a suitably varied selection of locales – expect to use night vision goggles, thermal suits and high explosives over the course of the dozen missions on offer. The controls feel fairly responsive but do almost seem ported from a PC game – there are so many commands to get your head around that it can feel a little overcomplicated at times.



If it weren't for your trusty night vision goggles, you could have tripped over that dead person and really embarrassed yourself.



As you progress through the game, you'll be able to equip your SEAL with more and more potent firepower.



NAVY SEALS

NOT JUST ANYONE CAN JOIN THE U.S. SPECIAL FORCES…

The nature of this genre lends itself wonderfully to large-scale multiplayer shoot-outs so it'll come as no surprise to hear that this is where the crux of the game lies. The game modes cover well-trodden ground – bomb disposal, hostage rescue and so on – and do so fairly well, albeit in a slightly more dumbed-down manner than we'd like. Tactics and strategies can be used but doing so isn't rewarded as well as it could be – even the more complex modes can be won by eight one-man armies. Even so, there's a lot of fun to be had with *SOCOM*'s online potential and if you do just want to go on a killing spree, there's even a mode to allow this. Headset use in multiplayer is also a lot more amusing; you'll hear less: "Bravo, run to Charlie," and more: "Give back my gun, you dirty thief!" – just the kind of thing the game needs to keep it from getting too heavy-going.

For a game so heavily based in multiplayer functionality, *SOCOM*'s one-man show is surprisingly enjoyable. The integration of the headset into the one-player game is a superb achievement both technically and practically – while its use may be limited, it fulfils its purpose perfectly. Missions tend to be a little linear, with many secondary missions and sub-objectives often leading you in a specific direction. This isn't necessarily a bad thing but there's easily room for a little more freedom here before the tasks become too daunting or confusing. The fact that there are only 12 missions is a little grating, although in their defence these are given fair replay value by the varied equipment you can choose and the optional secondary objectives in the field.

It may not be the most opulent jewel in Sony's crown but striking a perfect balance between good looks and running smoothly online is never easy – we'd gladly sacrifice the former for the latter. Unfortunately, it's not quite that clear-cut and beneath the fairly average exterior lurk a few minor lag issues. Nothing worse than the odd judder and nothing that detracts from the gameplay but their presence tarnishes the surface somewhat. Sound is passable but this seems almost excusable, especially in multiplayer when the headset is buzzing with orders and abuse.

The best way to grade this is by its competition and we can safely say that on the PS2, there isn't really any to speak of. On other consoles only *Ghost Recon* on Xbox and *Conflict: Desert Storm* for GameCube currently match or surpass *SOCOM*'s accomplishments. Sure, the PC has several titles that could humble this game, but short of shelling out for a gaming standard PC, this is as close to becoming a special forces operative as many of us will get. Kind of.

VERDICT 7/10
PLAYABLE AND ENJOYABLE BOTH ONLINE AND OFF

TALK TO ME

The bundled headset incorporates a microphone and earpiece, making communication a breeze. At the touch of a button, you can issue orders to team-mates in single and multiplayer modes as well as listening in on their ideas and replies. In one-player mode this is particularly useful, giving the lone agent the opportunity to plan attacks and spring traps. As with all such ventures, giving the nation a voice has its drawbacks and in this case one such pitfall is idiots. Be it loud-mouthed brats with a feeble grasp of anything aside from profanity, or those who take the whole thing way too seriously (much as we enjoyed [nwo]DeAtHbRiNgA666's company), the overly vocal minority tread a fine line between creating a unique experience and triggering an involuntary lunge for the Reset button. Thankfully, as with Xbox Live, these people are rarities and, for the most part, the headset is an asset to the game.



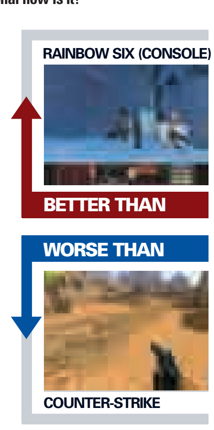
Long range neutralisation, sniper style. Great fun.



Come on, that's not very professional now is it?

RAINBOW SIX (CONSOLE)
BETTER THAN

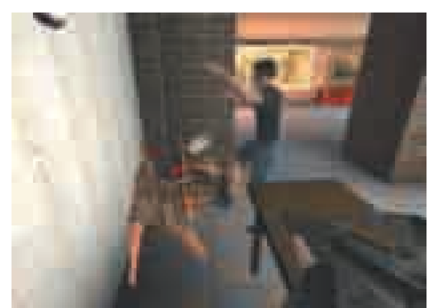
WORSE THAN



COUNTER-STRIKE



Decapitations are the order of the day throughout the game, and the heads of your victims make great footballs.



The physics engine is one of *Postal 2*'s few qualities, making for some impressive ragdoll deaths and object interactions.



The game is filled with self-parody, and includes the Running With Scissors offices complete with bad-boy CEO Vince Desi himself.

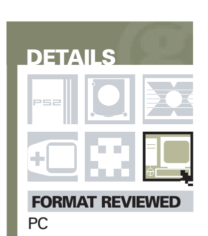
games™ FINGERPRINT

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

FUNNY GUY: *Postal 2* features 'tongue-in-ass humour', as creator Vince Desi describes it.

HOLY WAR: Watch in awe as gun-toting vicars take on a band of Islamic fundamentalists.

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PC

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
Whiptail Interactive

DEVELOPER
Running With Scissors

PRICE
£29.99

RELEASE
Out now

PLAYERS
1

MINIMUM SPECS
733MHz processor, 128MB RAM, 1.2GB HDD space, 32MB video card

POSTAL 2

A FUNNY THING HAPPENED ON THE WAY TO THE SHOPS, DARLING…

Six years have passed since the infamous *Postal* was released amidst a blaze of controversy over its shameless portrayal of gratuitous violence and political incorrectness, the likes of which had never been seen before in a videogame. Needless to say, when developer Running With Scissors announced the sequel would parade an all-new first-person perspective (with *Unreal* engine and Karma physics technology to boot), eyebrows were raised by censors and wannabe psychopaths alike.

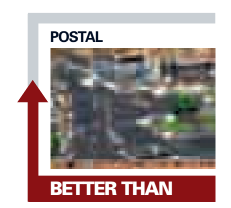
Whilst *Postal 2*'s distinctively dark brand of humour may not be everyone's cup of tea, we believe that originality is originality – no matter how depraved – and were particularly intrigued by the game's promised level of non-linearity. When Postal Dude leaves his trailer-park home with a list of everyday errands, such as buying milk or returning a library book, his destiny is placed entirely in your hands. While you could choose to make his journey to the shops an uneventful one, crossing a town crammed with tempting opportunities for any budding serial killer makes this a very unlikely prospect indeed. Similarly, the tasks themselves can be approached in a number of ways. On reaching the shop you could simply wait in line with everyone else, decide instead to urinate all over your fellow citizens to persuade them to leave the queue, or resort to dousing the whole lot of them in petrol and flinging a match their way. And then urinate on them.

Sadly, this superb potential for freeform gameplay is completely lost in the disappointing quality of its delivery. The game features some of the most abysmal combat we've seen in an FPS for some time, with baffling inconsistencies to the damage your shots inflict and some laughably flawed AI. Likewise, interiors are terribly primitive and come sparsely furnished with objects made from the crudest geometric shapes. By far our biggest gripe about the game, however, has to be the frustrating regularity of load points, each involving an unwelcome break in play of around 45 seconds. These points are helpfully signposted, but each zone is relatively small and you may be forced to cross several of these en route to your destination. The accumulation of these faults ultimately undermines any desire to explore for long, and makes for an altogether less entertaining affair than the wanton killing sprees *GTA3* allows players to perform between missions as a mere a supplement to the main game itself.



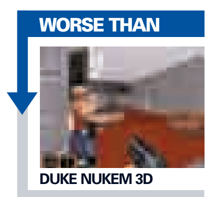
VERDICT 3/10
GREAT POTENTIAL RUINED BY AWFUL EXECUTION

POSTAL



BETTER THAN

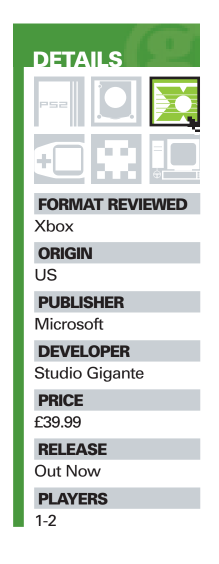
WORSE THAN



DUKE NUKEM 3D

CAN TAO FENG HOLD ITS OWN AGAINST THE BEAT-'EM-UP BIG BOYS?

TAO FENG: FIST OF THE LOTUS



DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
Xbox

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
Microsoft

DEVELOPER
Studio Gigante

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1-2

Any new contender stepping into the Xbox one-on-one beat-'em-up arena had better have something special up its sleeve, because it's going to come up against some pretty tough competition. With the likes of *Dead Or Alive 3* and *Mortal Kombat: Deadly Alliance* doing the rounds at the moment, and the mighty *Soul Calibur II* on the way, how many of us are going to cough up forty notes for anything but the genre's one or two top titles? But expectations were high when John Tobias, co-creator of the legendary *Mortal Kombat* series, sent his latest brainchild, *Tao Feng: Fist Of The Lotus*, into the fray. Could the game actually possess the, er, calibre to take on *Soul Calibur II* and friends, or was it all likely to end in tears?

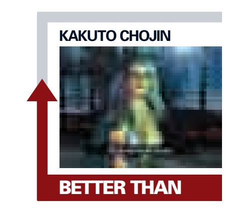
Tao Feng has the standard set-up you'd expect from any console-based fighter with its Story, Versus, Survival and Team Battle variations on the punch-up theme. The game's 12 combatants are a nicely varied bunch, featuring your typical wizened Chinese master, surly man-mountain and scantily clad female types. But, quite frankly, the only aspect of any beat-'em-up we really give a hoot about is what goes on when these guys get down to business in the arena of conflict. Sadly, the all-important gameplay within *Tao Feng* simply isn't up to scratch. While we do tend to prefer a good old-fashioned bare-knuckle affair over games where fighters rely more on their supernatural powers, the combo-based action in *Tao Feng* lacks the quality to attract seasoned campaigners and just isn't enough fun to keep the casual gamer interested for long.

Although no amount of amusing features can compensate for core gameplay, we were impressed by a couple of notable elements. There's plenty of satisfaction to be had from pummelling opponents through the interactive scenery, and the progressive depiction of a character's wounds as they take a beating is excellent. Another nice touch is your ability to affect the effectiveness of an adversary's punches or kicks by damaging their relevant limbs.

Unfortunately though, rather than being the title contender many were hoping for, *Tao Feng* would far more likely qualify to be Frank Bruno's next opponent. Although it's by no means the worst beat-'em-up we've ever played, it's hard to see what *TF:FOTL* was supposed to offer that would compete with the many superior titles already on the market.

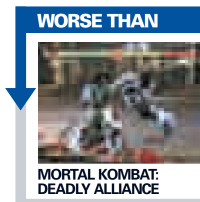
VERDICT 4/10
BELOW PAR GAMEPLAY, BUT A FEW NICE IDEAS

KAKUTO CHOJIN

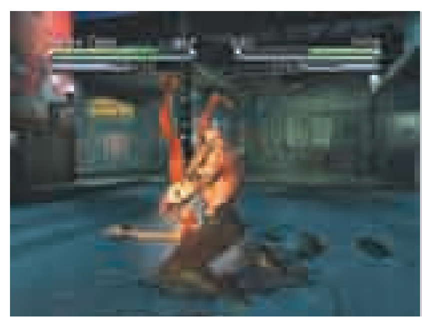


BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



MORTAL KOMBAT: DEADLY ALLIANCE



Grappling moves provide the most entertainment, as opponents can be pummelled into the floor, walls or any nearby piece of scenery.



Characters and environments are fantastic to look at, but the novelty doesn't keep some seriously flawed gameplay hidden for long.



Besides an array of combos, each character has a couple of special moves that can be pulled off when their Chi meter is full.

gamesTM **FINGERPRINT**
WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE
LIMB DAMAGE: A broken arm doesn't stop these guys, but punching power will suffer.
WRECK THE PLACE: We've never seen a brawl cause so much devastation to the surrounding area.



There are plenty of special bonus cars to unlock such as a Hot Rod, Fifties mobster wagon, Daytona racer and even an American cop car.



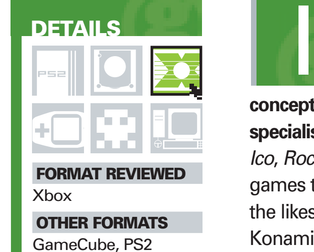
Although they get better as you progress, even the computer cars crash out loads – but make sure you don't get caught up in the mess.



BURNOUT 2: POINT OF IMPACT

FINALLY, ACCLAIM FEELS THE NEED FOR SPEED ALL OVER AGAIN

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
Xbox

OTHER FORMATS
GameCube, PS2

ORIGIN
UK

PUBLISHER
Acclaim

DEVELOPER
Criterion Games

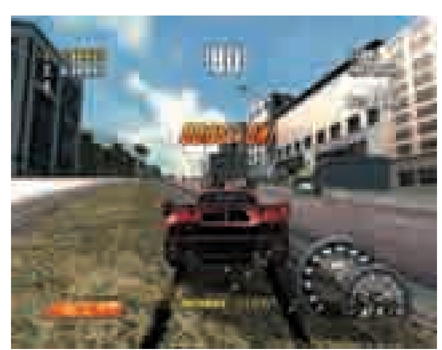
PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
Out now

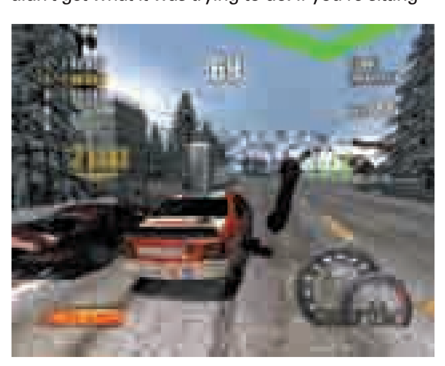
PLAYERS
1-4

It's a sad fact these days that some really good games don't get the appreciation they deserve – even if they look great, feature interesting concepts and receive rave reviews from the specialist press. Don't believe us? Then just look at *Ico*, *Rocky* and the original *Jet Set Radio*; all great games that failed to make any kind of mark against the likes of EA's licences, Rockstar's violence and Konami's ball skills. The strange thing is that even though it featured two of the things that people like in games these days (namely cool cars and high velocity), this is exactly what happened to *Burnout 2* on the PlayStation2 as well.

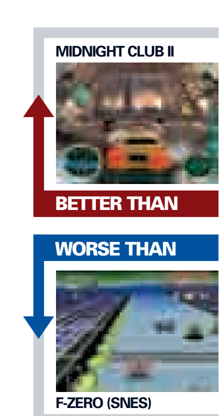
Although it certainly sold well enough when it appeared in October 2002, a combination of factors – including getting lost in the run-up to Christmas and the fact that a lot of people didn't really get that it was more than a basic racer – meant the game never reached the heights Acclaim might have hoped for. Despite all this though, Acclaim has thankfully decided to give the series another turn of the wheel (so to speak) and has brought *Burnout 2* to the Xbox and GameCube. However, this isn't just another lazy port done with the intent of raking in a little more profit – instead, Criterion Games has worked hard to make these newer versions of the game take advantage of the more powerful hardware, as well as throwing in a few bonuses for good measure. The biggest problem that the *Burnout* series faced when it was first conceived was that a lot of people didn't get what it was trying to do. If you're sitting



Burnout 2 being based on speed, the key to winning is to use the Burnout as often as possible. Oh, and not to crash. That's important too.



Don't forget, there are no rules here – if winning means having to shove your opponents into the walls, don't think about holding back…



■ Careless driving costs lives – but considering how fast *Burnout 2* can go, you'll be crashing quite a bit until you get really good at it.



FAQs

Q. MANY STAGES?
Pretty much – there are 15 challenges in Championship mode (some set over multiple races), with a further eight unlocked once you complete those. These are damn tough, mind.

Q. MONOTONOUS GAMEPLAY?
Not really, considering the placement of cars every time you play is random – you can play the same track over and over without having the same actual race twice. Plus, there are the different styles of race…

Q. DIFFERENT STYLES?
You've got Grand Prix challenges (lap-based tournaments over several races), Pursuit challenges (chase the enemy car and ram it off the road) and straight runs from A to B, as well as the Crash Junction section.



■ Filling your Burnout Meter can be done in several ways, but the best is to drive on the wrong side of the road into the oncoming traffic.

games™ ENHANCED

IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL

LOOKIN' GOOD: Improved lighting, reflections and polygon techniques make *Burnout 2* look lovely.
TOTAL CARNAGE: More challenges have been added to the Crash Junction section.

there thinking that it's just another arcade racer á la *Project Gotham Racing* and *SEGA GT 2002*, stop right there because you're wrong. What *Burnout 2* offers over regular arcade racers is an emphasis on speed and danger rather than overly-complicated courses, impossibly-skilled computer opponents and a ton of other gimmicks that risk muddying the waters of fun.

As with all the best ideas, it's a fairly simple concept to grasp. As you race along each course, the Burnout Meter at the bottom of the screen gradually fills up – the more dangerous your actions (such as driving on the wrong side of the road, having near misses with other cars and powersliding around corners), the faster it fills. When it's completely full, you can hold down the Burnout button and start really flying round at some insane speeds. But there's a catch – although reaching top speed isn't all that tough, stopping your car from smashing into obstacles and any of the other cars on the road is something else. It's this combination of trying to keep ahead of the opposition, going as fast as you can, racking up Burnout combos (by using boosts in a continuous chain) and all the while avoiding anything that gets in your way that gives the game its thrills. It's not fancy or packed with excessive frills; it's just fun.

Of course, this is exactly the same thing that the first *Burnout* offered, so why should you fork out for the sequel? Probably because pretty much everything that was wrong with the original has been ironed out in some shape or form, that's why. Criticised for being far too harsh with its crash physics and damn near impossible against some of the later opponents, the original suffered a little for concentrating a bit too much on the 'look at our bullet-time crash effects' and not enough on the actual game. In particular, the focus on collisions (where even brushing past another car at high-speed resulted in some painful-to-watch smashes) was certainly detrimental to the game, which is why *Burnout 2* tones things down a bit. Obviously, there's still plenty of scope for turning your car into a burning wreck if you slam headlong into anything, but now you'll be able to get away with nudging past cars and scraping against walls if a corner gets too tight. The difficulty curve has also been levelled out, making later races less frustrating; although that's not to say the game's a pushover…

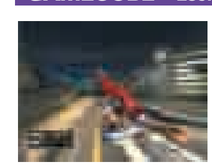
Admittedly, *Burnout 2* isn't anything drastically new considering it's been out for a while on the PS2 and is simply an evolution of the original game. However, that doesn't stop it from being any good – in fact, quite the opposite. Against the bog-standard racing action of *SEGA GT 2002* or *Project Gotham* and *Midnight Club II*'s demand for amazing feats of memory to make it round every course in first place, *Burnout 2* streaks past everyone by having the essential ingredients that every arcade racer needs – loads of speed, plenty of tracks and, most importantly, the most frenetic racing action around. It doesn't take a genius to see what's more important…

VERDICT 8/10
ARCADE RACING AT ITS VERY FINEST (AND FASTEST)

CRASH AND BURN

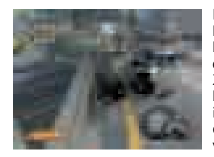
Although it's only a small sub-section of the game, there's a lot of sweet racing satisfaction to be had in the Crash Junction part of *Burnout 2*. Of course, 'racing' is probably the wrong word to describe it seeing as how the majority of the time you'll be slamming into as many other vehicles as you can at high-speed. Each stage features a short section of run-up track followed by a strip packed with cars; starting with a full Burnout Meter, the idea is to go as fast as you can before slamming into the traffic jam and causing as much carnage as possible. It's a simple concept, but then the most basic ideas are usually the most fun…

GAMECUBE £39.99 OUT NOW



For once, the 'Cube doesn't suffer in the control department – the pad works perfectly. In fact, aside from a few lighting effects, this is pretty much the same as the Xbox version.

PS2 £29.99 OUT NOW



Not surprisingly, the PS2 version looks a bit ropey when compared to the Xbox and GameCube but that doesn't stop it being great fun. A definite bargain if you can get it cheap.

WOLVERINE HAS ANOTHER STAB AT VIDEOGAME STARDOM

X2: WOLVERINE'S REVENGE

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
Xbox

OTHER FORMATS
GC, PS2, PC, GBA

ORIGIN
UK

PUBLISHER
Activision

DEVELOPER
GenePool

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
Out now

PLAYERS
1

STAR WARS: BOUNTY HUNTER

BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



INDIANA JONES AND THE EMPEROR'S TOMB

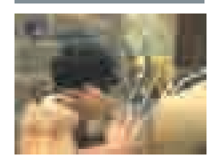
When we first heard that two of the biggest stars in sci-fi – Mark 'Skywalker' Hamill and Patrick 'Picard' Stewart – would be teaming up to provide the voices behind the latest X-Men game, we were intrigued. *X2: Wolverine's Revenge* sees Stewart reprising his role as Professor Xavier, while Hamill is perhaps less predictably cast in the title role as the vengeful mutant himself. Although scheduled to coincide with the release of the second *X-Men* movie, the game is clearly rooted in the comic book version of the saga both in terms of style and storyline.

With a plot by *Wolverine* comic veteran Larry Hama, fans should find the lone wolf's exploits in the game consistent with his previous Marvel adventures. Not only will our hero encounter old adversaries Magneto, Juggernaut and fearsome arch-nemesis Sabretooth, but players will have the complete selection of Wolverine's special abilities at their disposal to ensure the good guys win the day. A tap of the white button will extend or retract those famous claws, activating Wolverine's special healing abilities between inter-mutant scraps, whilst holding the left trigger engages his heightened senses. One of the most welcome variations to gameplay is the element of stealthy movement that allows players to sneak up on unsuspecting foes. Sadly, these scenarios are mostly scripted and little opportunity is provided to integrate this feature into more general play. Equally entertaining yet overly linear is the string of set-pieces players must complete during the course of most levels, culminating in some exhilarating boss battles.

Diverse as some of these features and scenarios may be, gameplay never really expands far beyond putting together single-button combos or executing special strikes by simply pressing the B button when prompted. The resulting action is visually rewarding but severely lacking any sense of achievement and offers very little replay value over the game's relatively short duration. The uninspiring environments and overall graphical mediocrity don't add much appeal either, but despite its faults this game could easily have turned out a lot worse. With its refreshing variety of gameplay features, *X2* enjoys some success in setting itself apart from the most basic slash 'em-up affairs, and the set-piece action is reasonably fun while it lasts.

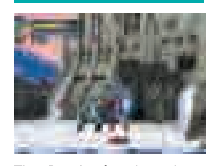
VERDICT 4/10
SPECIAL MOVES CAN'T SAVE AN UNSATISFYING TITLE

MULTI £29.99/£39.99



PS2, GC, PC
The game's relatively primitive look means very little variation in appearance across all the next-gen platforms, with the advanced capabilities of Xbox and PC not being fully harnessed.

GBA £29.99

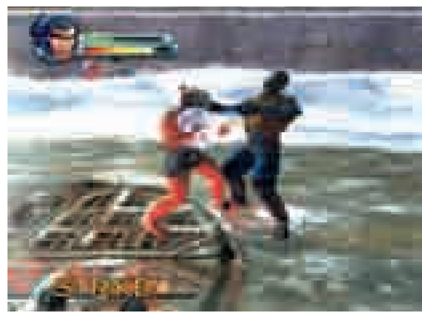


The 3D action found on other consoles is traded for a standard 2D scrolling platform engine on the GBA, yet Wolverine's many special abilities still manage to feature in the gameplay.

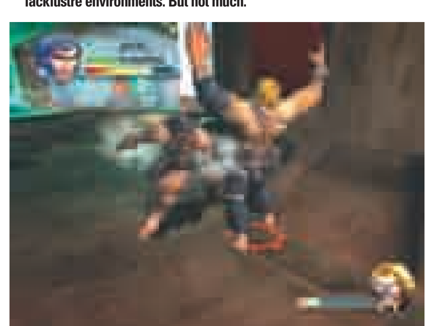


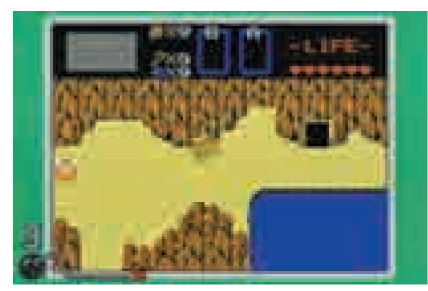
Look at your man there, running around in the nip. Don't worry, you can pick up a range of costumes for Wolverine in secret bonus areas.

gamesTM
FINGERPRINT
WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE
IMPRESS YOUR FRIENDS: Some dazzling special strikes and combos can be pulled off with ease.
ALL STAR CAST: *Star Wars* legend Mark Hamill stars with Professor X himself, Patrick Stewart.



Wolverine's special attacks and combos help to make up for the lacklustre environments. But not much.





Look familiar? Many tributes are paid during the game to *Metroid*, *Excitebike* and even *Punchout*. Good stuff.



You really do have to wonder what, if anything, goes on in the heads of the people who created this…



games™ FINGERPRINT

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

SHORT: Five seconds of gaming at a time may not be enough for some.

WHAT?: Some of the games are unbelievably simple, others worryingly confusing.

During this unfeasibly short challenge you have to keep the kitten dry, or else. Nintendo's concern for animal welfare is admirable, but we do have to wonder if *Wario Ware* might just be a bit, well, bitty for some people.

DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
Game Boy Advance

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Nintendo

DEVELOPER
In-house

PRICE
£29.99

RELEASE
Out now

PLAYERS
1-4

IN THE TIME IT TAKES TO READ THIS, YOU'D HAVE LOST THREE GAMES…

WARIO WARE, INC.: MEGA MICROGAME$

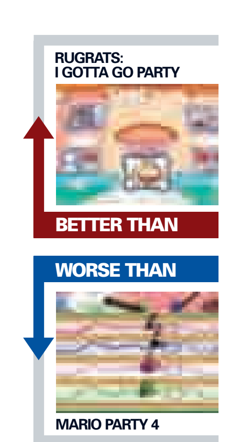
Every now and then, a game comes along that causes us to reconsider the very way we look at games. A game that bucks convention and has brave new ideas. Introductions aside, *Wario Ware* is one such game. It's hard to get excited about a game that's just a collection of mini-games, but the plot thickens. You see, these games are short. About five seconds short and unthinkably fast. What little semblance of narrative exists can be immediately dismissed as unnecessary, but how are we to rate such a collection?

Can we judge it on the strength of individual games? Not fairly. Not only are they far too numerous but the quality is also unbelievably varied. With the entire game using just the A button and D-pad, the events include button mashing, timed presses, quizzes and, for the Nintendo purist, five-second versions of classics like *F-Zero* and *Zelda*. Some of these do require genuine skill whereas others rely heavily on luck to pass, but how can you fairly judge a game that's over in a single button press? Can we rate it on its aesthetics? Hardly. While some areas of the game glow with a cartoon radiance, others stem from the monochrome Game And Watch family and are therefore slightly less impressive. Audio is a similar situation, by which we mean while certain tunes and samples are truly superb, there are parts that attempt to replicate yesterday's gaming moments. The bleeps and blocks do this with aplomb but could they be deemed acceptable in a modern game? Somehow, we doubt it…

Can we rate it on its standalone appeal? Almost. With so many brief bursts of gaming going on, different people will surely react very differently to *Wario Ware*. Replay value is a tough aspect to call, simply because it'll come down to which games you enjoy and how much you actually like them – Practice mode does just test your skills at a single game, getting faster and harder until you can't take the heat. Since breaking it down is an impossibility, the only thing we can do is to consider the entire package as a whole. Nintendo has certainly come up with a bold idea and has executed it as well as can be expected. But while the end result is a thoroughly enjoyable experience while it lasts, the fun was over a little too quickly for our liking. Even the addition of full games to unlock, like *Dr. Wario* (see what they've done there?), seems a little contrived, detracting from the three words that make *Wario Ware* such an interesting title: Short. But. Sweet.



SHORT BURSTS OF FUN BUT LITTLE LASTING APPEAL





Once Kirby absorbs a swordsman, he takes on a rather familiar form. Anyone out there guess who? It's not exactly rocket science…



Douse Kirby in water and he'll don goggles and a snorkel to help him swim; just another of those little touches that ultimately does nothing.



Kirby manifests himself in yet another form with a fancy new weapon. Not wishing to be obvious, or anything, but we think it's the Cutter…

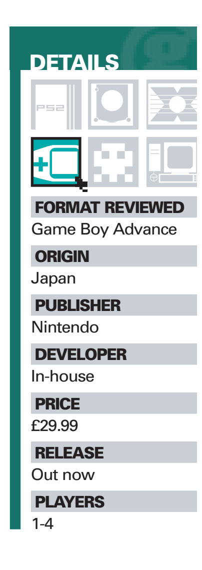
games™ ENHANCED

IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL

NEW GAMES, NEW DANGER: Because of the four-player link-up in the GBA version, Nintendo has decided to bring in entirely new mini-games that are more multiplayer-friendly than the NES originals.

THE ULTIMATE REHASH OR THE REHABILITATION OF A CLASSIC? ER, BOTH ACTUALLY

KIRBY: NIGHTMARE IN DREAM LAND



DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
Game Boy Advance

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Nintendo

DEVELOPER
In-house

PRICE
£29.99

RELEASE
Out now

PLAYERS
1-4

Ask any gamer to name a Nintendo character franchise and you'll get a variety of answers. Mario is the most obvious, but then there's Zelda too, and probably Samus as well. But what about the pink, vacuum-mouthed blob, Kirby? It's unlikely anyone would name him without prompting, even though he's been around since the days of the Game Boy. Hell, he even had a game on the NES about a decade ago – a point Nintendo seems to be making all the more obvious with Kirby's first GBA outing.

Yes, *Kirby: Nightmare In Dream Land* is a NES port. Even though Nintendo has spent most of the GBA's short life porting its back catalogue to the handheld, making Kirby's first appearance simply a tarted-up version of the 1993 NES title *Kirby's Adventure* is being a bit cheeky. The name change and lack of acknowledgement from Nintendo even makes it look as though it's trying to keep it quiet… Shame on them. That said, we're talking some serious tarting up here rather than the bog-standard porting that both *Super Mario World* and *Yoshi's Island* received. With its seriously overhauled graphics, *Kirby: NIDL* almost looks like a totally new game. Almost.

Enhanced visuals aside, however, we're talking about a game that's not only ten years old, but that you could probably pick up in NES form for less than a fiver or (god forbid, because we all know it's illegal) play on an emulator for free. That's why Nintendo has tried to tip the balance in the GBA's favour by making a vital addition that no NES game could ever contain: a four-player link-up mode. This combines with three totally new mini-games, which can also be enjoyed in the single-player adventure. The link-up mode can be played with a single game pak to enable multiplayer versions of the mini-games, but if you've got multiple copies of the game you can play a co-operative version of the main adventure. But is this enough? Well, pretty much. It's doubtful that anyone looking to pick up *Kirby: NIDL* will have played the original NES version, and even though it's not that difficult it's still fun, particularly when played with friends. Obviously, we don't want to praise Nintendo for its constant rehashing of old games but at least it picks the right games to do it with.



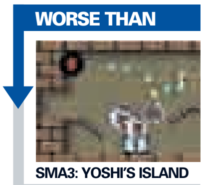
VERDICT 7/10

AN OLDIE, BUT A GOODIE – AND WITH MULTIPLAYER TOO

PINOBEE: QFTH

BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



SMA3: YOSHI'S ISLAND

IT'S JUST LIKE HAVING YOUR OWN HORSE – BUT WITHOUT THE MESS



DERBY OWNERS CLUB: WORLD EDITION

DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
Arcade

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
SEGA

DEVELOPER
Hitmaker

PRICE
£1 per race

RELEASE
Out now
(limited locations)

PLAYERS
1-8

Although the concept of an arcade horse racing game sounds good, in practice it ends up being an example of humiliation. Why? Because by falling into the *Dancing Stage* category of arcade machines (requiring a large amount of physical effort to succeed), traditional racing games make you look like a loon, lurching back and forth on the back of a plastic horse. As well as being incredibly tiring, this isn't actually much fun; after all, horse racing's about sitting down and studying the form rather than sweating like an overweight mare.

Thankfully, SEGA is on hand to bring us *Derby Owners Club*; a 'proper' racing game, focusing more on training your horse into a race winner than flailing about like someone having a fit. With up to eight people playing at once (one per small podium unit in front of the giant main screen), the whole point of the game is to raise a foal from birth and give it the right food, encouragement and training to go from average nag to triple crown-winning veteran. This might not sound like the most stimulating experience imaginable but then appearances can be deceptive.

Once you've put your pound in and sired your horse (by picking its parents and giving it a name), you'll find the game is split into training and racing. You need to make the right choices during the training session to improve your horse's chances of winning the upcoming event; not surprisingly, failure means you'll hamper its future performance. Then it's onto the race where the attention switches to the large screen and you'll see all the action as you would on the television. However, your input doesn't stop there – you still have to urge your horse on with some good-natured whipping that can spell the difference between success and defeat.

As the game can theoretically go on forever (after twenty races, your horse retires and you can use it to breed a new one), it's no surprise that *Derby Owners Club* uses SEGA's Card Reader System to let players save their progress. This is obviously a good thing, as it's not the kind of game you'd want to play for ages at a time – particularly as it costs £1 a race, regardless of whether you win or lose. As a quick blast with your mates every so often though, *Derby Owners Club* is great fun. Though naturally, it's a slippery slope from here to losing your wages down the bookies…

VERDICT 8/10
VIRTUAL HORSEPLAY AT ITS VERY BEST

FINAL FURLONG



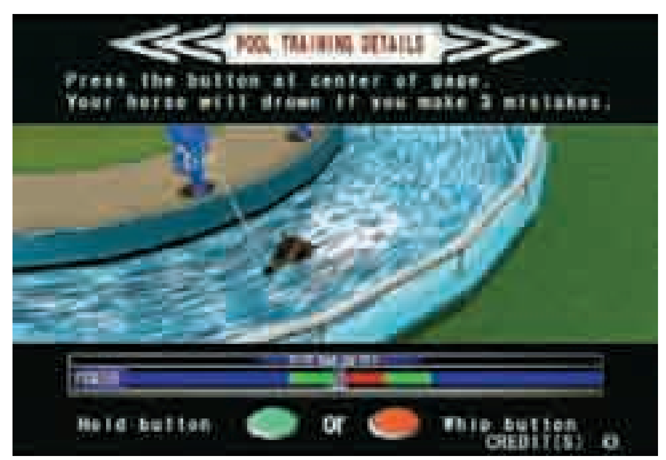
BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN

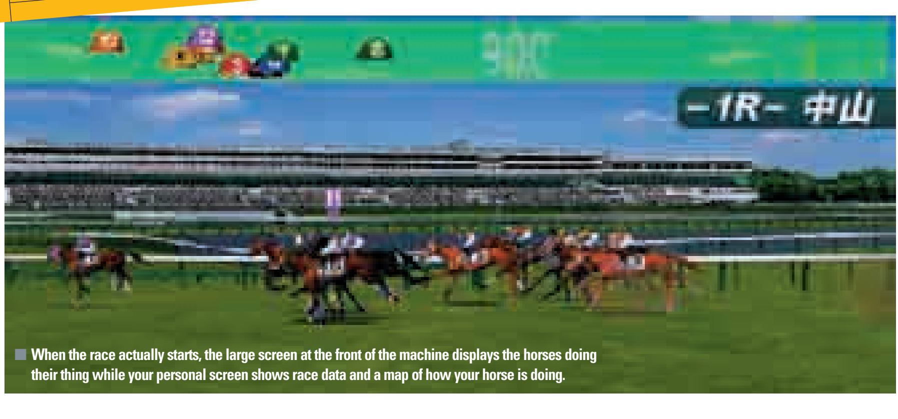


OWNING A REAL HORSE

FINGERPRINT
WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE
KEEP STILL: At last, you can play a decent horse-racing game without looking like a berk.
RACE CARD: SEGA's magnetic card storage system means you can race and breed horses for ages.



Training is important, but you should spread your efforts over several types of exercise rather than concentrating on the ones you're good at.



When the race actually starts, the large screen at the front of the machine displays the horses doing their thing while your personal screen shows race data and a map of how your horse is doing.



Earning your horse's trust is all about treating it right and giving it food that it likes – otherwise, you're likely to get a hoof in the face. Bananas are a big yes, burgers probably a big no.



Home conversions of arcade games are a real mixed bag. For every gem like *Crazy Taxi* or *Time Crisis 2*, there's always a *Vampire Night* or a *Daytona* poised to disappoint us. Given Namco's history for bringing arcade games home with style, we've been expecting good things of *Soul Calibur II* on our consoles.

Picking up where the Dreamcast title left off, *Soul Calibur II* continues the legend of soul and sword in typical style. New characters Talim and Raphael impress with their stylish takes on extreme violence (using twin batons and a rapier respectively), though other newcomer Necrid with his jigsaw puzzle move set doesn't have the same impact.

A wealth of modes has been made available for the home version with Time Attacks, Survival and the other usual suspects all here, capped by the wonderful Weapon Master mode. Travelling the world performing tasks to earn money and experience, the odds are against you as you must win countless fights with various stipulations – short time limits, only certain attacks do damage… you'll need a firm grasp both of the game and your chosen character.

But while the gameplay, modes and physics are shared between the three home versions, there are areas where they differ. Sometimes these are just minor tweaks, others are much more noticeable, so we played all three versions to death with a view to finding out which one is the definitive home conversion.

DETAILS

Publisher:	EA/Nintendo
Developer:	Namco
Price:	£59.99 (Import)
Players:	1-2
Release:	UK: Q4, US: Q3, Japan: Out now
Fighters:	20
Stages:	13
Weapons:	228

Format:	Xbox
Save:	8 Blocks
Exclusive:	Spawn
Weapon:	Battle Axe

Format:	GameCube
Save:	4 Blocks
Exclusive:	Link
Weapon:	Sword/Shield

Format:	PlayStation2
Save:	139 KB
Exclusive:	Heihachi
Weapon:	Bracers/Fists

THE LEGEND WILL NEVER DIE

AS WE FINALLY GET HOLD OF ONE OF THE YEAR'S MOST ANTICIPATED BEAT-'EM-UPS, HERE'S THE LOWDOWN ON ALL THREE HOME VERSIONS OF SOUL CALIBUR II

AESTHETICS

IT'S LIKE A VIOLENT BEAUTY PAGEANT, WITH HUGE WEAPONS…

Xbox

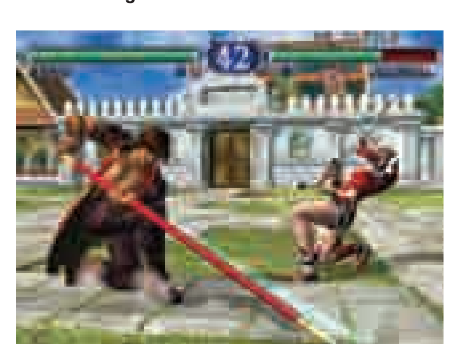
If it weren't for the gorgeous high-definition potential, we'd have placed this version on a par with the GameCube game. When it comes to the competition, *Soul Calibur II* may not quite hit the splendour of *Dead Or Alive 3* in terms of character models and environments, but connection is much more solid and the inter-character glitching that dogs Tecmo's brawler is extremely rare here. There can be a little non-detrimental juddering at times (albeit very occasionally) in all three versions, even this, the (technically) supreme version. However, this was also present in the arcade version – are we getting to the point when being arcade perfect can be a bad thing?

GameCube

The colourful little box always has a way of surprising us with flashy visuals and *Soul Calibur II* is no exception – it's absolutely beautiful. There isn't much basis for comparison on the GameCube in terms of beat-'em-ups but from a purely cosmetic standpoint, this is in the top tier of software. Taking the PS2-standard code and improving on it, the GameCube version occupies the middle ground between the PS2 version and the Xbox version's high definition output. It also sports some impressive effects and filtering over the PS2 game. In all honesty there's very little in it, but a little goes a long way and the end result is a marked improvement in favour of the Nintendo console.

PlayStation2

Considering it's supposed to be the runt of the litter, the PS2 version holds its own rather well. If faced with all three versions running at once, this is probably the only one you'd be able to pick out – but while it may be noticeably inferior to the Xbox and 'Cube games, nothing else on the PS2 comes close. Outshining *Virtua Fighter 4 Evolution* and *Tekken 4*, character models and environments are superb, as is connection between fighters and backgrounds. Some minor juddering still exists (as we said, this is straight out of the arcade) but taking into account the weaker hardware, the results are astonishing. A beautiful title in its own right, but put in its place by souped-up rivals.







CONTROL

IS SLICING AND DISEMBOWELLING AS SIMPLE AS IT SHOULD BE?

Xbox

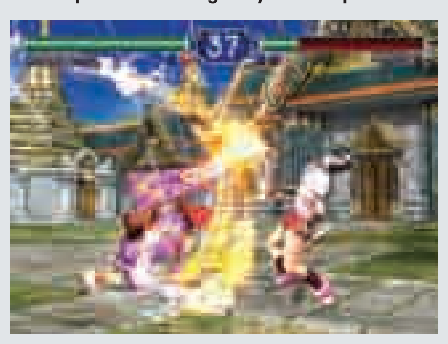
This controller's similarities with the Dreamcast pad certainly don't do the game any harm here – the Xbox version is as instantly playable as can be. The White and Black buttons serve as handy shortcut buttons and configuring these as throws or hard-to-reach combinations (X and B, for instance) will certainly make your gladiatorial life simpler. Both versions of the controller are equally functional for this bout but we preferred the Controller S simply for the improved face button layout. Whatever your preference, you'll find the game as immediate and easy to play with the Xbox controllers as with any other peripheral.

GameCube

Considering how much fire the GameCube's bulbous controller has been coming under (particularly for beat-'em-ups), we were stunned at just how well it works for the game. If it weren't for the fact that control familiarity has had the better of us since the Dreamcast version, we'd almost be tempted to say that this button layout (the only configuration to alter the standard layout), works best. Buttons aren't everything, though, and a lot of your preference for this pad lies in movement controls – while D-pad players will probably want to invest in an arcade stick or third-party peripheral, analogue users should be more or less at home. Not perfect by any means, but in terms of what we were expecting (and fearing), this is truly excellent.

PlayStation2

The universal controller strikes again with yet another horribly user-friendly set-up. The same face button layout as both the Dreamcast and Xbox controllers makes for yet another 'pick up and play' experience, and whatever your style of play the Dual Shock 2 can accommodate it. The four configurable shoulder buttons make the catalogue of moves even simpler to perform and both D-pad and analog stick provide ample control. Use of the stick can make the fighting feel slightly loose – more so than in the other two versions, strangely – but given the generic nature of the controller, the level of precision is as high as you can expect.



CHARACTERS

THREE EXCLUSIVE FACES, BUT WHO COMES OUT ON TOP?



PLAYSTATION2

PlayStation2

For a weapon-based fighter to take an unarmed character under its wing is undoubtedly an odd decision, but once again we're quite pleasantly surprised. Heihachi's certainly the weakest of the three exclusives but at the same time he's the one that seems to best belong (from a style standpoint, at least).

Once he starts throwing punches, it's a one-way trip to *Tekken* Central with ten-hit combos and flashy juggles galore – just the kind of thing this series has done so well to avoid. His lack of weaponry alone just keeps reminding you that he shouldn't really be here, and every mammoth swing from Astaroth's huge axe failing to hack off a limb only serves to further this argument. In the end, he actually plays quite well but we can't ignore the feeling that he just doesn't belong here.

Xbox

Without an obvious character or mascot to join the cast of heroes, Namco had to look elsewhere for their Xbox exclusive character. Luckily, with Necrid creator Todd McFarlane on board there wasn't far to look and so Spawn was added to the game. Spawn plays fairly well but suffers from a similar problem to Heihachi in that he fits in with the rest of the fighters until he starts actually fighting. At that point, *Matrix*-esque floating moves and projectiles shatter the illusion that Spawn has a place on the Stage of History.

His high-flying antics are by far the worst part – no other character attacks in this manner (at least, not with such devastating regularity) and most fighters find themselves ill-equipped to defend themselves. But we'd still take Spawn over Necrid.

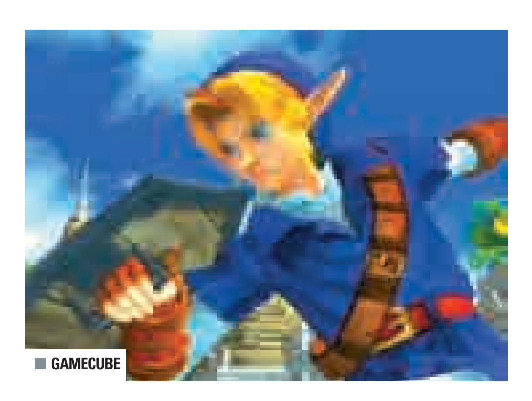


XBOX

Spawn certainly looks the part but when he starts throwing his fists and feet around he doesn't quite fit in. Poor lad.

"ALL THREE VERSIONS DO THEIR SYSTEMS PROUD AS FINE EXAMPLES OF THE GENRE AND, AS SUCH, COME HIGHLY RECOMMENDED"

"NINTENDO'S ELFIN HERO SHOULD FIT IN PERFECTLY BUT A CLASH OF STYLES REARS ITS UGLY HEAD"


GAMECUBE



GameCube

Putting *Zelda* hero Link in *Soul Calibur II* works on many levels – as an established character his move set was almost predetermined and, on merit of his inclusion alone, countless *Zelda* fanatics will feel the need to own this. Bizarrely, Link fights as if he were a part of the series from the start, and while he does have several ranged attacks these have been made particularly easy to avoid.

It could be argued that many of his attacks are overly powerful or that he can ring out opponents too easily, but neither is strictly true. As with most characters, heavy attacks have tell-tale warning signs and while he may have some dangerous moves, these often leave him open to attack if avoided. In theory, Nintendo's elfin hero should fit perfectly onto the Stage of History but a clash of styles once again rears its ugly head. He looks so wrong but feels so right…

games™ RECOMMENDS

FEED YOUR THIRST FOR BLOOD WITH THREE OF THE BEST

CAPCOM VS SNK 2

Arguably the best 2D fighter of recent years, the plethora of modes and characters make this a must-have. Lately, GameCube and Xbox versions have disappointed by mistaking unbalanced nonsense for 'innovative control' (thank you, *EO*-ism) but the core game is wonderful nonetheless.

VIRTUA FIGHTER 4

The pinnacle of the series just got even better with *VF4 Evolution*, but either way it's still one of the best 3D fighters money can buy. Forget fireballs and dragon punches – this is the real deal in all its high kicking, bone-crunching glory.

SOUL BLADE/CALIBUR

Despite their age, the two previous instalments in the tale of soul and sword still stand up remarkably well today, on top of which both should be available fairly cheaply. Did we mention that *Soul Blade* has the best videogame intro ever?

VERDICT

HOW DO THE THREE VERSIONS COMPARE?

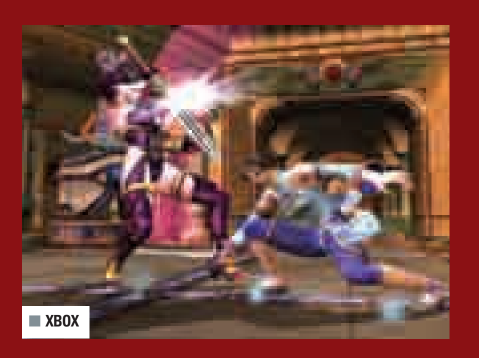
Multiple console owners take note – whichever version of *Soul Calibur II* you choose, you won't have made a bad choice. Although we'd have to recommend the Xbox or GameCube conversions over the marginally less dazzling PS2 game (for high-end eye candy and the best exclusive character respectively), all three versions do their systems proud as fine examples of the genre and, as such, come highly recommended.

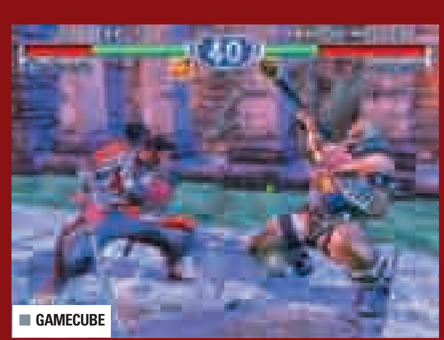
After the first *Soul Blade*, its sequel, *Calibur*, managed to capture the magic but dropped some of the spontaneity and originality as is practically unavoidable with a sequel. The same is true again of this instalment – looking, playing and even feeling like part of the same series, the only reason *Soul Calibur II* isn't more jaw-dropping in 2003 is familiarity. Technology has only come so far, meaning that where visuals don't utterly shame its Dreamcast predecessor it doesn't exactly feel as new or impressive as it probably should.

Taking a step back, *Soul Calibur II* is not without its flaws. It's easy to dismiss the minor slowdown and clipping problems since they were in the arcade original, but hasn't the home version been in development long enough to alleviate these petty problems? The fact that four characters remain curiously locked even after full completion is something of a mystery as well; three of these are actually used during the course of Weapon Master mode so why they would be left out is anyone's guess.

For all this, the combination of wonderful gameplay mechanics, incredible longevity for a fighter and sublimely addictive multiplayer swashbuckling make for one of the best fighters of this generation. Critics will be quick to slam it as a rehash or an inferior product to its predecessors, and we'll concede that for a little while we feared that this might be the case. But upon further inspection, we found a deeper and more fluid game than ever before. Revolutionary it may not be but exceptional it most certainly is.

RATING 8/10
EVERY BIT AS GOOD AS ITS ARCADE COUNTERPART


XBOX


GAMECUBE


PLAYSTATION2



Paint the town red… **Wizball Commodore 64 [Ocean] 1987**


000
2UP
000000


eMag



RETRO
VIDEO GAMES ACT
A PARAGON PUBLICATION
NO.6 MAY 2003
00p
CASTLEVANIA
BRINGING GOTHIC GREATNESS TO GAMERS FOR 17 YEARS
THIS MONTH IN 1989
PIXELLATED PLEASURES FROM THE 80s!
SYSTEM 3
WE GO BEHIND THE SCENES WITH THE CREATORS OF THE LAST NINJA
PLUS CLASSIC GAMING ADS!
MODE 7
AND HOW KONAMI USED IT
STARS OF CASTLEVANIA
AT HOME WITH THE BELMONTS
WATERCOLOUR CHALLENGE
A GALLERY OF GOTHIC ILLUSTRATIONS
NEO GEO
ARCADE ENTERTAINMENT SYSTEM
THE HISTORY OF SHIN NIHON KIKAKU
THE FUTURE IS NOW

Retro News

FIND OUT WHAT'S GOING ON IN THE HERE AND NOW OF RETRO GAMING…

While some of our readers are hardcore gamers, out to find that elusive title to complete their retro collections, others simply want to revisit the games they grew up with, usually by getting hold of second-hand systems and carts or tapes. Of course, nothing is worse than whacking *Pole Position* into your C64 and watching those rainbow-coloured lines for ten minutes, only to think: 'Jesus, what a load of cack' once the game has actually loaded. Obviously we're not having a go at Namco's racer specifically, but rather at being disappointed in general by some of the games we used to love.

The question is, what other way can retro games be enjoyed without tarnishing our treasured memories? Well, aside from reading Retro™, where you can reminisce about all your favourite titles without actually playing them, many older games get re-released or updated with prettier visuals and occasionally improved gameplay too. Just look at *Castlevania Chronicles* on the PSone – based on the Sharp X6800 version of *Akumajo Dracula*, the game blends the traditional gameplay with Konami's lovely new art style.

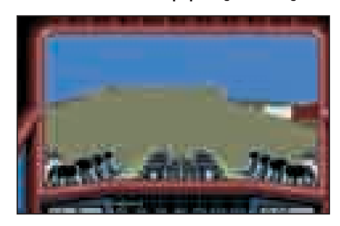
As well as remakes and updates, many new titles released today take references from older games – you just have to know what to look for. At Retro™, we spend so much time looking to the past that we often overlook the way that older titles are shaping the present. With updates of *Contra*, *Rygar* and *Ninja Gaiden* coming out this year, and the final instalment in the *R-Type* series on the way, there's more to retro gaming than out-of-date games.

DO YOU THINK THEY WERE LISTENING?

Geoff Crammond announces a remake of Stunt Car Racer

Back in issue 2 we asked the question, "Why don't they remake *Stunt Car Racer*?" Well, it appears that Geoff Crammond himself may have been reading, as he has confirmed that an update is indeed on the way.

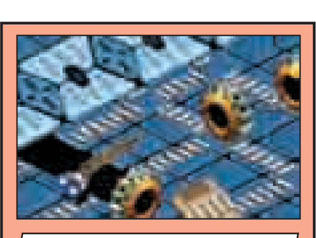
▶ The original was great, can you imagine how good a remake could be? We're palpitating at the thought…





At the time of writing it isn't clear which system or systems the game is in development for, though you can assume that the sort of wild track layouts seen in the original will benefit hugely from the 3D processing power on offer today. What is looking fairly definite, though, is that the game will feature some sort of online connectivity, which we have to admit is an exciting prospect. Just imagine switching on your games system, linking to a network and challenging a friend to a quick race around a circuit – perhaps even one you've designed yourself.

Since the recent closure of MicroProse, along with the cancellation of *GP4* on the Xbox, many wondered what Geoff Crammond would do next. Apparently he'll be overseeing the creation of this new project, though right now it's unclear who is even developing it. Watch out for more news soon.



A VIEW FOR A GB

It's been revealed that upcoming games developer In-Cubus is putting the final touches to a Game Boy Advance port of Sammy's Neo-Geo hit *Viewpoint*.

Despite its near complete state, the game (which is a carbon-copy of the of the six-level-long arcade classic) currently doesn't have a publisher, though judging by the screenshots alone, we don't expect it will be long before someone snaps it up.

Seeing as how *Viewpoint* was never released on the Neo-Geo Pocket Colour, it's great to see this unique title coming to a handheld format for the first time. Hasn't it done well?

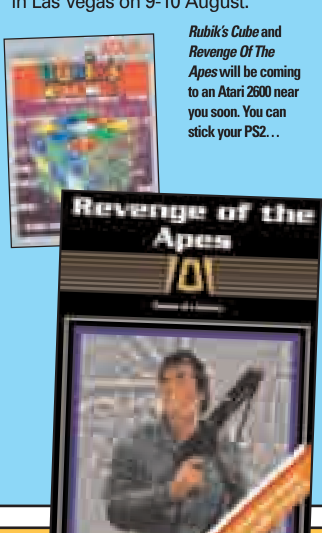
NEW AND OLD

Retro remakes announced for classic consoles

The end of March saw the fourth PhillyClassic show take place in Philadelphia, USA. The event, which celebrates just about every aspect of retro gaming, not only saw many rare classics making an appearance, but was also the place where a selection of new, reproduction and homebrew titles were previewed for the first time.

Among the most vivid new titles on offer were four Atari 2600 games, including *Rubik's Cube* – an unreleased 3D puzzle game that was originally dropped in favour of a 2D version – and *Revenge Of The Apes*, which until now had only existed in prototype form. Both titles will come on reproduction cartridges complete with lovely glossy labels and with professionally printed manuals and cardboard boxes.

Other announcements included *Entity* – a brand new Atari 2600 game developed by classic game author Mark Klein – and *Space Invaders Collection* (which includes three arcade versions of *Space Invaders*: monochrome, colour and *Space Invaders Part II*). Both games will be officially released to the public at the Classic Gaming Expo in Las Vegas on 9-10 August.



Rubik's Cube and *Revenge Of The Apes* will be coming to an Atari 2600 near you soon. You can stick your PS2…





In 1989, Nintendo was celebrating its hundredth birthday and doing rather well. The NES was booming worldwide, Mario was becoming more famous than Mickey Mouse, and the Game Boy was about to launch. This year would also see the release of the SEGA Genesis (Mega Drive) and the NEC Turbo Grafx-16 (PC Engine) in America, though only one would survive the test of time…

UK CHARTS FOR MAY 1989

1: **Hand On Your Heart**
Kylie Minogue

2: **Requiem**
London Boys

3: **Miss You Like Crazy**
Natalie Cole

4: **Eternal Flame**
The Bangles

5: **I Want It All**
Queen

6: **Bring Me Edelweiss**
Edelweiss

7: **Beds Are Burning**
Midnight Oil

8: **Ferry 'Cross The Mersey**
Various Artists

9: **Baby I Don't Care**
Transvision Vamp

10: **I'm Every Woman**
Chaka Khan

TOP TEN TITLES FOR THE ZX SPECTRUM

1: Barry McGuigan's World Championship Boxing
2: The Games: Summer Edition
3: Into The Eagle's Nest
4: Manic Miner
5: The Real Ghost Busters
6: Repton Mania
7: Skate Or Die
8: Stormlord
9: Tetris
10: Vindicators

THE MOVIES THAT GOT MADE IN '89

1: The Abyss
2: Batman
3: Dead Poets Society
4: Driving Miss Daisy
5: The Fabulous Baker Boys
6: Indiana Jones And The Last Crusade
7: The Little Mermaid
8: Parenthood
9: Sex, Lies And Videotape
10: When Harry Met Sally

WORLD NEWS

HISLOP GETS POKED IN THE EYE

It was this month in 1989 that *Private Eye* was ordered to pay £600,000 damages to Sonia Sutcliffe, wife of Peter Sutcliffe (aka the Yorkshire Ripper). The satirical magazine edited by Ian Hislop (now better known for his regular



appearances on the BBC's *Have I Got News For You*) had suggested that in a deal with the *Daily Mail*, Mrs Sutcliffe had received £250,000 for telling her tale as the wife of a serial killer.

At the time, this was the biggest libel payout in British history, exceeding the previous figure by £100,000. Hislop pointed out that the sum was one hundred times larger than the amount awarded to three of Peter Sutcliffe's victims, and immediately lodged an appeal. The payout was later reduced to just £60,000.

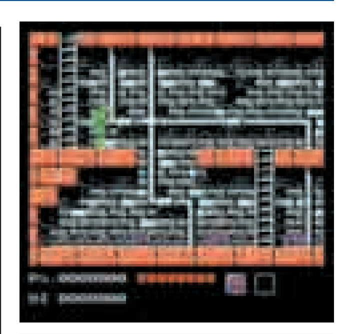
GAMING NEWS MAY 89

Heroes in a half shell come to consoles for the first time

It's hard to believe that the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles were invented almost 20 years ago by comic book artists Peter Laird and Kevin Eastman. The idea had come about when the two were up late mocking typical comic book characters (which tended to be either ninjas or mutants) by sketching creatures that blended these two popular themes.

The story they devised at the same time told of how each of the turtles (as well as Splinter, their rat mentor) had been exposed to a radioactive substance, giving them their impressive fighting abilities. The idea was hungrily snatched up and laid out in comic book form by the small publishing company where Laird and Eastman worked, which was understandably overwhelmed when the first issue had to be reprinted three times to meet the massive demand.

The following years would see the Turtles go from strength to strength and by 1989 the TV series, movies and a selection of videogames were at various stages of completion. For Konami – which already had a string of arcade and console hits – winning the rights to the Turtles licence would turn out to be incredibly lucrative, especially seeing as the company would go on to release more than 20 Turtles games.



▶ Those lean, green fighting machines don't know when to stop – they may be coming to a console near you…

One of the earliest of these was the first of four NES games – *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* – which launched in Japan on 12 May, 1989. Combining explorative top-down maps above ground, with platform-based action levels in the sewers, the game was a best-seller and to this day remains one of the most popular NES titles.

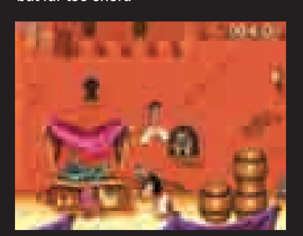
Throughout the rest of 1989 the Turtles would become ever more widespread, and by 1990 the cartoon was appearing on more than 125 television channels around the world every day. Of course, things are quieter for the Turtles these days though a revival is underway, meaning that they could be mainstream again before the year is out. Konami has already announced its plans to release a brand new videogame on PS2, GC, PC and GBA.



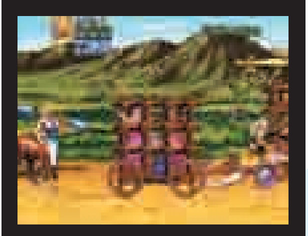
THIS MONTH'S FAVOURITES

These are just a few of the retro titles that have been stealing precious hours from our ridiculously busy schedule this month…

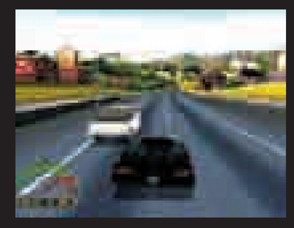
ALADDIN
Capcom recently announced a GBA translation of this SNES title, so we thought we'd refresh our memories of how it plays. It's still very enjoyable, but far too short.



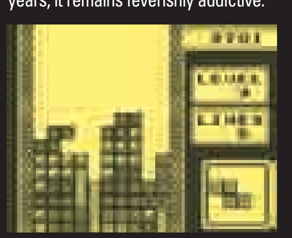
GOLDEN AXE: THE REVENGE OF DEATH ADDER
The often-overlooked arcade sequel to *Golden Axe* has been keeping us busy. Five glorious levels of pure bliss, and it's four-player simultaneously.



THE NEED FOR SPEED
The Panasonic 3DO may have lacked decent software, but EA's *The Need For Speed* still plays well, even today. Now dated visually, the A-B tracks are top notch.



TETRIS
One of the most famous videogames ever, *Tetris* is the definitive puzzler – easy to pick up, hard to put down. Still unbelievably playable after all these years, it remains feverishly addictive.



Look Back In Anger

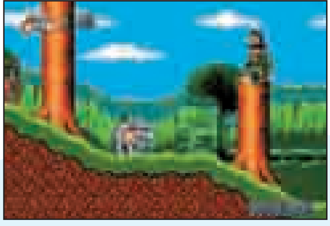
An unassuming little platform game or simply ostentatious cutesiness aimed at present-buying grandparents?

ROLO TO THE RESCUE



At the moment, platform game fans have very little choice when finding a decent title in their favourite genre. Aside from the obvious ones such as *Mario*, *Jak And Daxter* or the wonderful *Ico*, it really is quite a poor show these days.

Of course, it hasn't always been like this. In the early Nineties it seemed as if every other game revolved around running through side-scrolling levels and jumping over holes that came along, usually as a small rodent of some sort. In fact, the genre was so overpopulated that, by the end of the 16-bit era, companies were churning out all sorts of thoughtless crap. EA even had the audacity to do so on Mega Drive cartridges it manufactured itself (you remember, those awful square ones with the pointless yellow bit on the left-hand side).



▶ Isn't he just adorable? Couldn't you just wrap him up and take him home? Well, no, not really.

Among the most uninspired of these platform game offerings were Sunsoft's *Aero The Acrobat*, Ocean's *Mr Nutz* (which, underneath its sickeningly cutesy facade, wasn't actually a bad game) and, of course, EA's *Rolo To The Rescue*, which came on one of those offending square cartridges.

The yucky cartridge wasn't nearly as horrid as the game itself – from the badly planned and often confusing level design to a selection of predictable forest animals (led by an elephant that looked like a Duplo building block), this truly was a travesty of a travesty. The game was also painfully huge, featuring level after level of the same Early Learning Centre-inspired colour schemes and irritating circus music, all linked together on a jigsaw puzzle map.

However, while you may think that picking out the single worst element of such a flawed game would be difficult, you'd be wrong. You see, we could put up with the awful level designs and infuriating soundtrack, we could even put up with the bland colours and sickly sweet characters, but we simply couldn't get our heads around the speed and twitchiness of the controls.

Quite how you were expected to land on platforms that were smaller than your character when it felt like you were wearing tap shoes on an ice rink is beyond us. Elephants are slow creatures that take a while to do anything. They most certainly aren't squirrel-sized Duplo blocks that climb trees at Mach 4. Never mind, though, most gamers have forgotten all about it now.

DON'T GO CHANGING

It may have been funny in *Meet The Parents*, but it was no laughing matter when Fokker was removed from the Western release of *Power Stone*

POWER STONE

Born in Indonesia in 1890, Anton Fokker was famous for building the Spin III, as well as other aircraft used by the Germans in the First World War. It perhaps wasn't that surprising then, that Capcom should choose to use the name Fokker for one of the characters, a pilot, in its Dreamcast beat-'em-up, *Power Stone*. But when the game was translated into English, the character was mysteriously renamed Falcon. Why on earth…?

Well, our initial thoughts were that Capcom simply wanted to avoid using that name in Europe because of its history, despite the fact that few gamers would know, or even care, that Anton Fokker ever existed. More likely is that the company's American division thought the name to be far too close to something rather rude, and removed it to be on the safe side (like we're immature, or something).

Strange really when you consider that fights in *Tekken* could feature Wan Vs King, while Peach Fox Mario was an interesting team in *Super Smash Brothers Melee*. See, we're not immature in the slightest, are we?





▶ Ever concerned for our moral well-being, Capcom kindly decided to remove the name Fokker in case any unsuspecting gamer mistook it for a rude word. Like fu

S•M•A•S•H T•V

WHAT BETTER THAN A GAME SHOW WHERE YOU CAN SLAUGHTER THUGS AND WIN A TOASTER AT THE SAME TIME? THAT'S EXACTLY WHAT WE THOUGHT…

If it was big money and prizes you were after, then seeking out the cash-packed bonus rooms was more important than anything else…

Big money, big prizes and we loved it – *Smash TV*, that is. Sure, everyone loves a good gameshow but watching people win virtual money and prizes isn't exactly the most riveting concept on the planet. Of course, if you took those expensive four-slice toasters, luxury holidays and brand new cars and tossed them into a high-tech arena, then threw in a hefty dose of cyborg slaughter and explosive weaponry… well, you'd have the best darn gameshow on earth. And that's before you even think about asking Bob Monkhouse to present it.

Having obviously overdosed on late-night screenings of Arnold Schwarzenegger's *The Running Man*, the bright sparks in the arcade division of Midway – or Bally Midway, as it was known back then – came up with *Smash TV*. Basically a tongue-in-cheek affair that encapsulated everything Arnie's movie had (over-the-top violence in a game show environment) and everything it didn't (pointless prizes and far too much firepower for its own good), the game managed to provide simple-yet-effective controls, highly addictive 'just one more go' gameplay, and possibly the most memorable and annoying soundbites on the planet.

You see, being an arcade game meant that *Smash TV* had to have enough presence to capture the imagination of anyone walking by. And what do all the best game shows have that stand out above all other TV programmes? Why, obnoxious hosts of course. It wasn't easy to ignore the wild-eyed man in the shiny red jacket shouting slogans that wouldn't seem out of place in *Robocop* ("I'd buy that for a dollar!") at the top of his voice – phrases like "Total carnage – I love it!" and "Good luck – you'll need it!" still ring bells in our head today. Of course, this was just a precursor to the action and even once you were knee-deep in the remains of Mr Shrapnel, you had keep your eyes open for those elusive keys that would grant you access to the Pleasure Dome near the end of the game.

Ah, yes, the Pleasure Dome. Despite being a tad disappointing once you actually made it inside (because it was just another small room, albeit one packed with loads of prizes and 'beautiful' women), the 'getting inside' bit was more than a little difficult and ultimately became the aim of any hardened *Smash TV* player. Collecting only ten keys across what amounts to over 40 screens doesn't sound that difficult but depending on how the machine you were playing was set up, it could range from being incredibly simple to damn near impossible. Grabbing keys when they appeared was one of the most frantic tasks of the game, since reaching them usually meant having to plough through a horde of enemies and running the risk of death. Still, that was nothing compared to fighting your way through every room, defeating all three end-of-show bosses and reaching the chamber outside the Pleasure Dome (pumping countless credits into the machine in the process), only to discover you've collected just nine keys.

Could this be one of the most frustrating moments in gaming history? It certainly comes close…

Format(s): **Arcade (first), NES, Master System, SNES, Mega Drive, Amiga, Atari ST**
Publisher: **Williams (Arcade), Acclaim (Console), Ocean (Computer)**
Developer: **Midway**
Price: **£Varies**
Release date: **1990 (arcade), 1991 (home formats)**

Greatest RETRO Game Ever



Ah, the Mutoid Man – at the time, one of the more memorable boss characters around. But he wasn't a patch on the very last enemy of the game.

SEQUEL-TASTIC

Surprisingly, *Smash TV* not only had a sequel but has also inspired another recent Midway game. The official sequel was *Total Carnage* – named after the phrase from the first game, released in arcades in 1992 and then on home systems in 1993 – which removed all the gameshow elements and instead placed you on the front line of an assault against evil dictator General Ahkboob. In 2001 though, Midway released *The Grid*, a multiplayer gameshow-based shoot-'em-up that, thanks to the 3D aspect, combined elements from *Quake III Arena* and *Smash TV*. Now if only it came out for the home machines… Online play, anyone?

S•Y•S•T•E•M

DEADLY NINJAS, CRITICALLY ACCLAIMED BEAT-'EM-UPS AND EVEN SICKLY SWEET PLATFORMERS – SYSTEM 3 HAD IT ALL. GAMES™ GOT IN TOUCH TO FIND OUT JUST HOW EASY IT WAS BEING ONE OF THE MOST REVERED 8-BIT DEVELOPERS OF ALL TIME

It's not often that a software developer can consistently deliver highly original and innovative games to both public and critical acclaim. When you're System 3, however, such accolades seemingly go hand-in-hand. Formed in 1984, System 3 burst onto the scene with the *Star Wars*-inspired *Death Star Interceptor*. *International Karate* (known as *World Championship Karate* in the US) quickly followed and became the first European developed game to achieve the number one spot on America's Billboard chart.

People soon realised that System 3 was a company to keep an eye on, and in 1987 gamers were rewarded with the groundbreaking *The Last Ninja*. Sequels to both *The Last Ninja* and *International Karate* quickly followed and before long the name System 3 became synonymous with Commodore 64.

Never afraid to try something new, later releases saw the creation of Grecian platformers (*Myth*), vertical shoot-'em-ups (*Dominator*) and *Chase HQ*-styled racers (*Turbo Charge*) – all original in their own ways and all adored by critics and gamers. Things went slightly awry with the arrival of the 16-bit computers as anticipated games like *The Last Ninja* franchise were incredibly sloppy ports, taking little advantage of the superior technology that the new machines possessed.



▲ Stealth, swords, cunning and a clean pair of black pyjamas – all that a fearsome ninja needs to survive in the world of *The Last Ninja*. Careful now…

System 3 is still creating games today (under the new moniker Studio 3) and is finally ready to release a follow up to the critically acclaimed *The Last Ninja 3*. We managed to track down Mark Cale, who worked on the original *Last Ninja* titles before founding Studio 3, to get his opinion on the 8-bit era, being an industry trendsetter and, of course, ninjas…

Q: WHAT MADE YOU CHOOSE THE ORIGINAL NAME SYSTEM 3, AND WHY THE LATER CHANGE TO STUDIO 3?

A: There were three of us and 'system' was a trendy word during the formative years of our industry. Why change? Well, it was felt that as the company matured and its operations embraced all the activities in our industry – developing, publishing and marketing – and we were doing more and more third-party development, that Studio 3 better encapsulated what we are doing.

Q: YOU'RE WIDELY REGARDED AS SOME OF THE BEST CODERS FOR THE COMMODORE 64. WHAT WAS YOUR MAIN ATTRACTION TO THE MACHINE OVER ITS PEERS?

A: One of the problems with many of the other machines was their design to a fixed cost. The biggest culprit of this was the Spectrum – it was long suspected that Sir Clive Sinclair designed a great machine and simply kept removing features and components till it could be made at a particular price. Commodore and Atari, on the other hand, crafted machines that were a delight to play and fun to programme.

When you look back at the early days and remember things like the Oric, Tangerine, Acorn rack system (the origin of the BBC machine), the BBC machine, Dragon, Elan and many others, they really didn't hold a candle to the Commodore 64 or Atari 400/800 for gaming. If only Commodore had stopped trying to make it into a business machine – or worse, a 'personal productivity tool' – then it would have and possibly still might control the games industry.

Q: CONSISTENTLY PRODUCING SUCH ACCLAIMED AND INNOVATIVE HITS AS THE LAST NINJA, IK+ AND MYTH MUST HAVE BEEN VERY TAXING. WHAT WAS SYSTEM 3'S WORK ETHOS?

A: It's easy to say that in those days the greatest games were created by the most maverick developers (a description we've never been shy of) and all that was required to create a game was lots of beer, pub games, pizza and Pro-Plus for the morning after. I'm not saying we didn't have that going on – our parties and press

MYTH: HISTORY IN THE MAKING

Set in ancient Greece, *Myth* was one of the only System 3 games to really divide critics' opinions, despite receiving over 22 awards worldwide. Taking the role of a purple-haired warrior you had to fight your way through increasingly tough levels and face some of the hardest guardians in gaming history.

Despite a few niggling gameplay elements (to defeat some bosses you had to have some knowledge of Greek mythology) the game was yet another superbly executed product. On the NES the game was licensed to Mindscape in America, where it was relaunched under the *Conan* licence.





◀ Don't know your Agamemnon from your Achilles heel? You might have come unstuck in *Myth* then…



trips were the stuff that industry legends were forged from. System had, and retains to this day, something else.

It's very difficult to pin down our 'factor X' but it includes elements of being able to put the right teams together, finding the best people for the job and remembering that developing the games has to be fun, otherwise what's the point?

Q: DEATH STAR INTERCEPTOR WAS YOUR FIRST GAME. WERE THERE ANY PRESSURES WORKING ON SUCH A WELL LOVED LICENCE?

A: No, it was a lot easier then.

Q: WHAT PROJECTS DID YOU WORK ON BEFORE SYSTEM 3 WAS FOUNDED?

A: None. I set up System 3 at the age of 17, 21 years ago.

Q: BESIDES SYSTEM 3'S GAMES, WHAT OTHER PROJECTS DO YOU WISH YOU HAD WORKED ON?

A: Easy really, *Space Invaders*, *Asteroids*, *Defender*, the *Super Mario* series of games, the *Street Fighter* series, *Metal Gear Solid* and *Daytona* (still the best racing coin-op).

Q: HOW DID YOU FIND WORKING WITH ARCHER MCLEAN ON THE INTERNATIONAL KARATE SERIES, AND DO YOU STILL KEEP IN TOUCH WITH HIM?

A: Archer is a great coder and good fun to work with. He worked on converting the original *IK* from the Spectrum and Amstrad onto the C64 and Atari 8-bit machines. He also converted the game to the Amiga from our Atari ST version which we had developed in Hungary.

I see very little of Archer now as he is focused more on snooker games as opposed to arcade action games. Shame really. He should have stuck to the mass market as opposed to niche product.

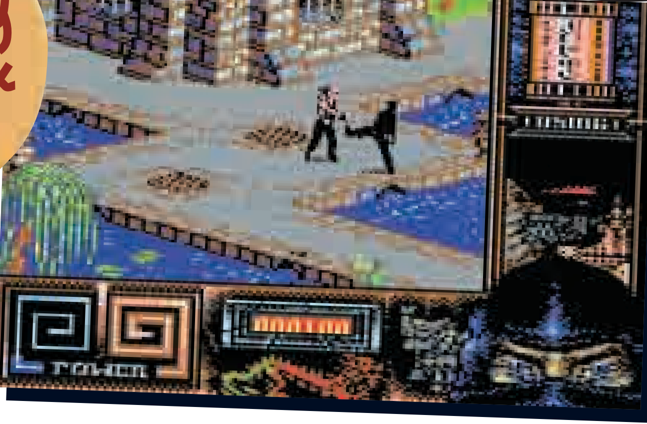
Q: WERE GAMES BETTER IN THE OLD DAYS?

A: Yep, no doubt about it. When did you last read a review that spent more time detailing the gameplay than the graphics or sound? There are still very few great titles. Getting the balance between gameplay and visuals is very difficult – making people understand that long-term challenge in a game is worth a lot more than a moment of glitzy effects.

If you look at the structure of big teams now with virtual regiments of artists, stylists, level designers, environment artists, visual content directors (and their assistants) and so on, somewhere down the list come the programmers.

Q: THE LAST NINJA FRANCHISE IS BY FAR YOUR MOST POPULAR WORK. WHAT ORIGINALLY INSPIRED YOU TO MAKE THE FIRST GAME?

A: I had, and still have, a great fondness for all things Japanese and exciting Hong Kong martial arts movies. I love Japanese history as it has so many parallels with our own, in particular, how far back it goes. Regarding the fascination with ninjas, well, they're like all the good bits from a broad range of *Boy's Own*-style stories or movies all rolled into one. There's action, stealth, intrigue and so on. They're just great characters from history.

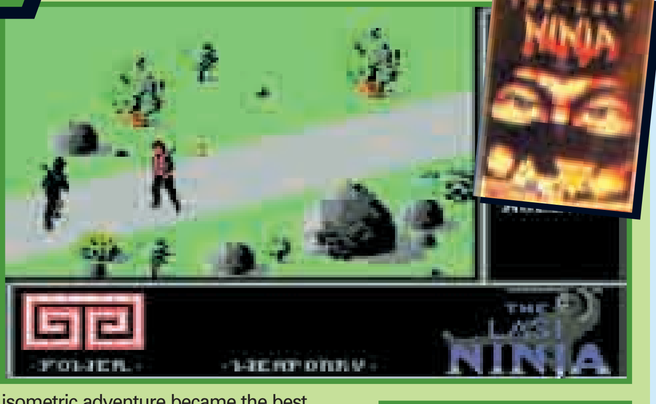


▲ *The Last Ninja 3* was the final instalment in the soon-to-be-inaccurately-named trilogy.

THE LAST NINJA

This is where it all started – if ever there was a franchise that got C64 owners quivering with delight it was *The Last Ninja* trilogy. Appearing in 1987, *The Last Ninja* saw you take on the role of Armakuni, the last surviving member of the Brotherhood of the Ninjas. Vowing revenge on the evil warlord Kunitoki, you battled your way through (and under) Lin Fen Island.

More combat-based than the later puzzle-heavy sequels, *The Last Ninja* was the ultimate proof that no one knew the Commodore 64 hardware like System 3. Animation and visuals were second to none and a moving score completed an extremely impressive package. System 3's 3D isometric adventure became the best selling C64 title of all time and shifted over 2 million units worldwide. Armakuni's adventure had begun and the sequels just got better and better every time.



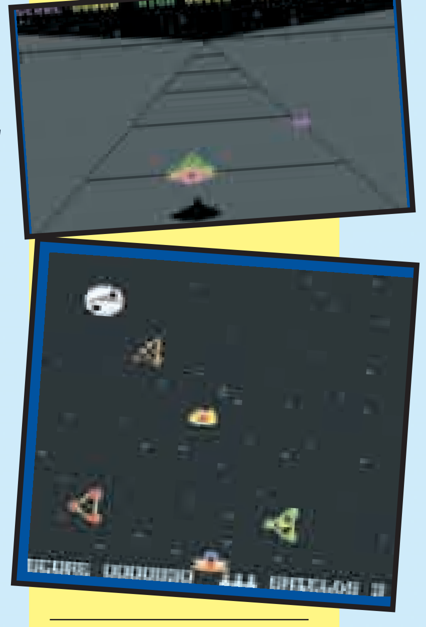


DEATH STAR INTERCEPTOR

Regardless of whether you felt it was inspired by, or simply ripped off, the *Star Wars* trilogy, there was no denying that System 3's first game was a great little shoot-'em-up. Get past the initially frustrating first level (aim your X-Wing through a series of consecutive rings) and you quickly got onto the good stuff.

The second stage saw you blasting away at the Imperial forces; TIE Fighters attacked in droves and would scale in size as they headed towards you. Such was the frantic on-screen action, you very nearly missed the approaching Death Star that slowly appeared in the left-hand corner of the screen.

The final assault recreated the famous trench run – there were more than enough enemies to shoot down and the final stretch would see you having to avoid multiple laser beams. Make your way through all that and it was time to drop a Photon Torpedo down the exhaust and start the whole thing all over again. Great stuff.



▲ *Star Wars* rip-off? Does it matter? *Death Star Interceptor* was a cracking shoot-'em-up with some neat graphical touches.

INTERNATIONAL KARATE +



Faced with the daunting prospect of making a sequel that superseded the original game (over 1.5 million units sold in the US alone), Archer McLean proved more than ready for the seemingly impossible task. A third fighter, copious amounts of trouser dropping and a great bonus game all came together to create a fantastic follow-up that is still appearing on consoles like the GBA a full 16 years after its original release.

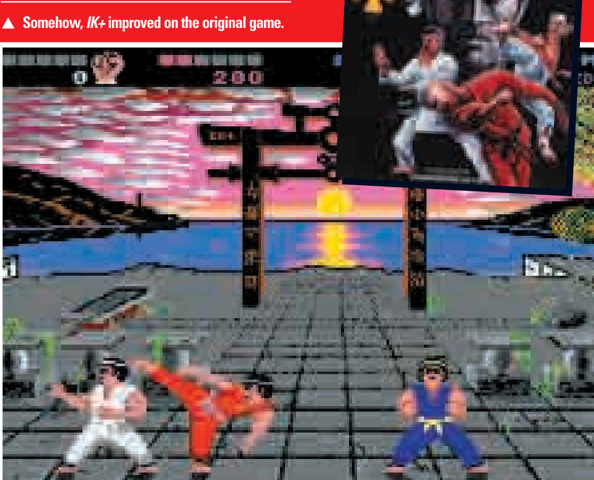
Combat throughout was extremely fluid with a grand total of 14 different moves being available (not bad for a joystick with only one fire button). McLean's attention to detail wasn't just used on the fighters – the background was full of detail; fish leaped from the water, birds flew overhead and caterpillars inched their way across the screen.

Affectionately known as *IK+*, the crowning jewel in the game was a scintillating score by Commodore 64 maestro, Rob Hubbard. As with many of System 3's titles, the game was critically lauded and remains a classic to this day.



▲ Somehow, *IK+* improved on the original game.







▲ *Flimbo's Quest* was an accomplished, but rather difficult, platformer from System 3.

Q: WHY DID YOU FEEL THE NEED TO MAKE* LAST NINJA REMIX *AND NOT ADD ANY ADDITIONAL CONTENT FOR AMIGA OWNERS?

A: To extend the shelf life we needed to reintroduce the title at the retailers' request in a new package. Hence the name *Ninja Remix*.

Q: SETTING* THE LAST NINJA 2 *IN NEW YORK WAS A FAR CRY FROM THE IDYLLIC LIN FEN ISLAND OF THE ORIGINAL. WAS IT A CONSCIOUS MOVE TO APPEAL MORE TO THE AMERICAN MARKET?

A: Not really. I decided that it would be fun to put a traditional warrior in a modern urban environment and not give him a gun. Plus it's damned hard to get a helicopter into 16th Century Japan.

Q:* THE LAST NINJA 3 *TOOK THE SERIES AS FAR AS EXISTING TECHNOLOGY COULD. IS THIS THE MAIN REASON WHY A SEQUEL HAS TAKEN SO LONG TO EMERGE?

A: One of the great defining qualities of Studio 3 is the close collaboration of the development talent and how everyone is given a hearing as to new ideas and directions for development to follow. At the time there were only a couple of the senior people, myself included, that wanted to continue with the *Ninja* theme whereas the vast majority of people wanted to look at new areas that might be more in keeping with the market.

However, now that we have reached a time in the company's life where we can afford to indulge ourselves and do projects that we really want to do, I've managed to put back in place the original key members of the team that made the old *Ninja* games so exciting, hopefully to repeat the success.

Q: ALL* THE LAST NINJA *GAMES HAD WONDERFULLY ATMOSPHERIC MUSIC AND POSSESSED MANY CINEMATIC QUALITIES. WERE THERE ANY FILMS IN PARTICULAR THAT INSPIRED THE CREATION OF THE MUSIC?

A: I personally didn't have much to do with the direction of the music except to let people know when it was exactly right for the game. So I can't really tell you what the original inspirations were.

Q: WILL THE NEW VERSION OF* THE LAST NINJA *FEEL FAMILIAR TO ANYONE WHO HAS PLAYED THE ORIGINAL GAMES, OR IS IT A COMPLETELY STANDALONE TITLE?

A: Yes, it is a standalone project but it has all the qualities that were present in the originals – the almost slavish mentality of getting things right, even the smallest details.

If I told you the number of revisions I've had done just to the running animations you'd think that I'd probably be able to do another complete game within the same workflow – and you'd probably be right. But that's the way it always has been with *Last Ninja*, and more than likely always will be.

S•Y•S•T•E•M• 3 S•Y•S•T•E•M• 3



▲ *The Last Ninja* marked the beginning of a series that would go from strength to strength.

Q: MANY GAMES BASED ON PREVIOUS TITLES SOMETIMES CONTAIN VERSIONS OF THE ORIGINAL GAME. ANY CHANCE OF FINDING A C64 VERSION OF* THE LAST NINJA *TUCKED AWAY IN THE NEW GAME?

A: Nice idea, you never know…

Q: MANY OF YOUR GAMES WERE PRIMARILY FOR THE HOME COMPUTERS, SO HOW DID YOU FIND THE EVENTUAL TRANSITION TO THE CONSOLE MARKET?

A: Tough. I think you'd find that a lot of people that made the transition, if they answered honestly, would say it can be very hard going. It's not really one thing in particular but coming from a free-for-all environment like a computer to the more structured, disciplined environment and ethos of getting a console game on the shelf then things can get difficult and frustrating. But you manage it in the end because that's where our game players are so we have to be loyal to the fans.

Q: VENDETTA SEEMED TO INSPIRE* THE GRAND THEFT AUTO *SERIES. ANY CHANCE OF A SEQUEL?

A: There's always a chance of a sequel from Studio 3. You know what they say about old great games – they're never get totally forgotten, they just get converted.

Q: WHAT WERE THE REASONS BEHIND DROPPING THE PROPOSED VERSION OF* THE LAST NINJA *ON THE SPECTRUM?

A: Who said that? It's a lie, I tell you. Bloody PR people, telling the truth when you least want them to…

Q: WHAT'S BEEN YOUR FAVOURITE GAME THAT THE COMPANY MADE?

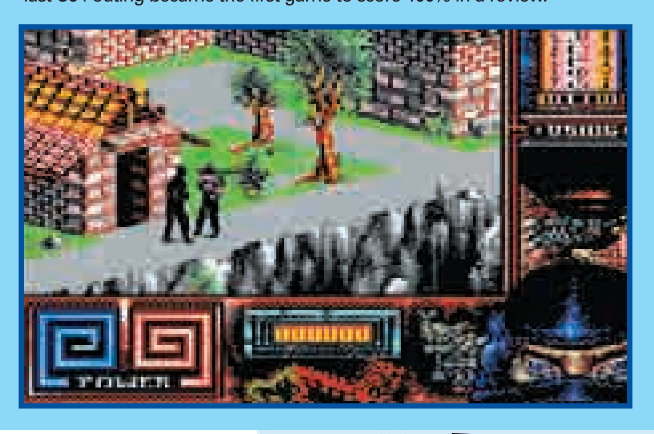
A: I have divided loyalty to two products. One is the *Last Ninja* trilogy which, for a long time, I never thought would be bettered. Then along came *Mob Rule/StreetWars* – a thing that I love dearly. Although the current *Ninja* could tip the balance.

THE LAST NINJA 3



Seen by many as the best ever C64 game, System 3 pulled out all the stops with *The Last Ninja 3* – everything that had made the series so popular with gamers was increased tenfold.

Originally designed as a cartridge release, poor sales for the ailing C64 GS convinced System 3 to stick with the tape and disc format. Starting off with a stunning intro (remember, this was made in 1991 on a humble C64) the presentation was faultless. Highly detailed visuals, some marvellous music (by Reyn Ouwehand) and some great puzzles all came together perfectly. Even a small bug (some versions lacked the bellows you needed to complete level 4) did little to diminish the game's credibility. Armakuni's last C64 outing became the first game to score 100% in a review.



FLIMBO'S QUEST

Not to be confused with the bizarre Fimbles that have currently invaded children's television, *Flimbo's Quest* was System 3's second stab at the platform genre. Bundled with the ill-fated C64 GS console and appearing on several other formats, the game saw you trying to rescue your beloved girlfriend from a suitably nefarious villain.

Production throughout the game was of a very high standard and contained suitably colourful visuals along with some fantastic bouncy tunes (by Reyn Ouwehand again). Flimbo himself was well-animated and, along with the standard platform moves, could leap down from platforms – he was also rather nifty with his sword (a good job too as this was a tough game).

Despite not showing as much originality as System 3's previous titles, *Flimbo's Quest* still proved to be extremely popular with critics and fans alike. It received numerous high scores in the mid-Nineties and became yet another feather in System 3's overcrowded cap.



Why Don't They Remake?

P·I·L·O·T·W·I·N·G·S

Just how did Nintendo make the console flight sim a mass market genre?



Although it doesn't get remembered as often as most of Nintendo's other games, *Pilotwings* was one of those rare titles that appealed to a surprisingly broad audience. Using the Super Nintendo's much talked about Mode 7 graphics technique, a pseudo 3D world was created by Nintendo's in-house Entertainment, Analysis and Development team led by Shigeru Miyamoto – a world in which all sorts of odd yet enjoyable events took place.

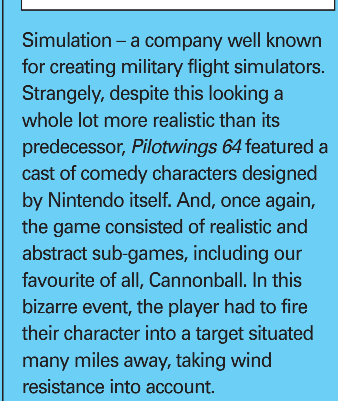
If you're amongst the unfortunate minority of gamers who haven't sampled the delights of this wonderful little game, the chances are you'll be asking the question: how can a console flight sim be fun? Well, with a selection of real-life events,

Title: **Pilotwings**
Released: **1991**
Publisher: **Nintendo**
Developer: **Nintendo EAD**
Format: **Super Nintendo**

such as skydiving or landing a biplane on a runway, mixed with more abstract events such as jetpacking, Nintendo somehow managed to pull it off.

Amazingly, the game didn't even feature the sort of cutesy characters people normally associate with Nintendo – everything was portrayed through the eyes of a trainee pilot and his flight instructor. Even so, *Pilotwings* wasn't without humour. While some of the demeaning comments the instructors made were moderately amusing, crash-landing a jetpack would result in a frazzled trainee with only their eyes visible against a sooty human silhouette, which was hilarious at the time.

Some gamers will recall that a follow-up was released to coincide with the launch of the Nintendo 64. Predictably entitled *Pilotwings 64*, the game was coded by Paradigm



Title: **Pilotwings 64**
Released: **1997**
Publisher: **Nintendo**
Developer: **Paradigm Simulation**
Format: **Nintendo 64**

Simulation – a company well known for creating military flight simulators. Strangely, despite this looking a whole lot more realistic than its predecessor, *Pilotwings 64* featured a cast of comedy characters designed by Nintendo itself. And, once again, the game consisted of realistic and abstract sub-games, including our favourite of all, Cannonball. In this bizarre event, the player had to fire their character into a target situated many miles away, taking wind resistance into account.

So why hasn't Nintendo resurrected *Pilotwings* on either the GameCube or Game Boy Advance? Well, rumour has it that work has



▶ Falling out of a plane? How difficult can that be? Harder than you thought, apparently.

already begun on a brand new GameCube game, though at the time of writing nothing has been confirmed. And what about a port of the SNES game making its way to GBA? So far there aren't even rumours of such a thing, though it would almost certainly be a painless development process and would clearly bring something a little different to the system if Nintendo did decide to do it. So come on Nintendo, it's up to you…

LAST MONTH'S NES SCREENSHOTS REVEALED

Wracked with doubt? Plagued by indecision? Let us help – here's the list of last month's NES screenshots…

FIRST ROW
Adventures Of Rocky And Bullwinkle
Hebereke
Fist Of The North Star
Metroid
Mega Man
Gunhead
Excitebike
Arkanoid
Bugs Bunny's Crazy Castle
Lode Runner

SECOND ROW
Snake Rattle And Roll
Choplifter
Castlevania
WWF Wrestlemania
Final Fantasy
Rygar
Prince Of Persia
The Addams Family
Toki
Super Mario Bros. 3

THIRD ROW
Hydlide
Chase HQ
Konami Sports
720
Dynamite Bowl
Metal Gear
Goal
The Empire Strikes Back
Dirty Harry
Salamander

FOURTH ROW
Renegade
Dr Mario
American Gladiators
Baseball
Adventure Island
Smash TV
Home Alone
Hook
Ice Climber
Elite

FIFTH ROW
Roadblasters
Twin Bee
Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles
Klax
Ganbare Goemon
Darkwing Duck
Boulder Dash
RC Pro Am
Dragon Strike
Ninja

SIXTH ROW
Kid Icarus
Pac-Man
Micro Machines
Tiny Toon Adventures
Tetris
Duck Hunt
Cobra Command
Crazy Climber
Hello Kitty World
Punch Out

SEVENTH ROW
Bonk's Adventure
Yie Ar Kung-Fu
Star Wars
Super Mario Bros.
Kirby's Adventure
Konami Hyper Soccer
Ghostbusters
Fantastic Dizzy
Ninja Gaiden
Marble Madness

EIGHTH ROW
Faxanadu
Tennis
The Legend Of Zelda
Contra
Snow Bros
Super Mario Bros. 2
A Boy And His Blob
Fantasy Zone
Spy Hunter
Double Strike



SAMURAI SHODOWN (Arcade) Original arcade flyer, 1993

RETRO

MICRO GAMES ACTION

Company Lookback

SNK

(1978 – 2001)



BEST KNOWN FOR MANUFACTURING THE PRICEY NEO-GEO CONSOLE AND MANY OF ITS GAMES, SNK WENT FROM BEING ONE OF THE MOST PROLIFIC DEVELOPERS AROUND TO BANKRUPTCY IN JUST A FEW YEARS. SO WHAT WENT WRONG?

It all started in the summer of 1978 – 22 July to be exact. The arcade industry was about to spring into life and development houses producing early videogames were cropping up all over Japan. SNK (or Shin Nihon Kikaku as it was known back then) was one such developer. It was 1979 when the company released its first two arcade games – a *Space Invaders* copycat title called *Ozma Wars* and a top-down racer called *Safari Rally*. Hardly innovative in concept and simple in execution, these two titles marked the start of SNK's 23-year stint in the games industry.

SNK continued to produce arcade games throughout the first half of the Eighties, though few managed to attract the sort of attention that rival developers' games received. Despite this quiet period though, one or two SNK games emerged that a few arcade-goers remember today, the most vivid being *Lasso*. Released in 1982, this brightly-coloured top-down action game revolved around catching animals with a lasso, much like SEGA's 1999 arcade release, *Jambo! Safari*. Of course, this unspectacular period for SNK probably had more to do with the state of the games industry at that time, rather than the creative ability of the company. The games industry crash of 1983/84 meant games developers were being cautious about their next moves. By 1985, however, the industry was on the way to recovery due to the popularity of the Nintendo Entertainment System. SNK latched onto the console in 1986 when it signed up as a third-party developer.

In fact, 1986 would be something of a renaissance period for SNK; the company changed its name from Shin Nihon Kikaku to SNK Electronics Corporation, and opened offices in California to handle its NES titles in America and Europe. This was also the year that SNK released its two most successful arcade titles so far, *Ikari Warriors* and *Victory Road* – two incredibly similar top-down shooters,

1978

SNK

Shin Nihon Kikaku is founded by former Japanese bantam weight boxing champion, Eikichi Kawasaki. A small company with little in the way of capital, it manufactures early arcade games and Pachinko tables, though it's a year before its first products are launched.

1979



The company releases its first two arcade games – top-down racer *Safari Rally* and *Space Invaders* clone *Ozma Wars*. Neither title is particularly original or impressive, though they get the job done. Although very much overlooked, these two titles mark the true beginning of SNK.

1986



Shin Nihon Kikaku officially renames itself SNK Electronics Corporation and releases *Victory Road* and *Ikari Warriors*, two titles which prove extremely popular with gamers. It also opens offices in America, and signs a deal to convert its arcade games to Nintendo's NES.

1989

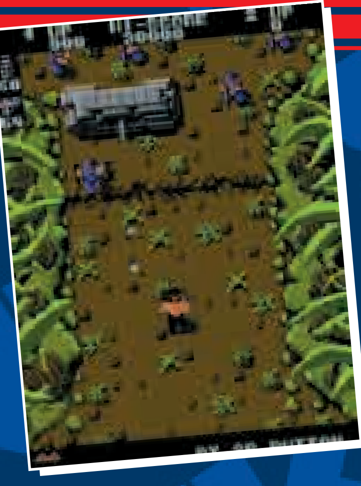


SNK releases its arcade Neo-Geo Multiple Video System (MVS) and its powerful 16-bit architecture allows for some impressive visuals to be produced. The system also features a memory card slot, allowing users to save their high scores and their position in the games.

1990



SNK releases the home equivalent of its Neo-Geo MVS arcade board, the Neo-Geo Arcade Entertainment System (AES). MVS memory cards allow data transfer between the arcade and the home. Sadly, the vast amount of memory in each cart means they cost over £200.



▲ *Ikari Warriors* (Arcade, 1986) SNK's popular two-player top-down shooter even allowed you to drive tanks. The game was also released on the NES.

both with a *Rambo*-esque flavour. After this jump-start, the company started to receive the sort of acclaim it had always deserved, and over the next few years it released a handful of classic titles.

Encouraged by its successes and now in a more comfortable position financially, SNK's next move was more risky, though the impact it had would win the company a place in the history books. Now very knowledgeable about arcade technology, the company began manufacturing its own arcade graphics kit, entitled Neo-Geo Multi Video System (Neo-Geo MVS). Released in 1989, this powerful 16-bit hardware used cartridge-based games, just like a home console, and could be connected to any JAMMA-compatible arcade cabinet (JAMMA being the Japanese Amusement Machinery Manufacturers Association). Unlike rival systems, the Neo-Geo MVS featured multiple cartridge slots allowing arcade owners to house more than one game in each of their cabinets. It was with its Neo-Geo technology that SNK went on to develop such classic games as *Fatal Fury, King Of Fighters, Metal Slug* and *Samurai Shodown*.

Content with its share of the arcade market and aware of the enormous profits Nintendo was making with the NES, SNK decided to release its Neo-Geo technology into the home. In 1990, the Neo-Geo AES (Arcade Entertainment System), went on sale at £380. And with games at £200 each, the console only found a small audience. Four years later, the company tried to increase support for its system by releasing a new model that incorporated CD-Rom technology. With CD games at just £40 each, the system was more appealing to the average gamer, though the lateness of its arrival (don't forget this was the same year that the PSone launched in Japan) and the fact that loading times were unbearably slow because of the single-speed CD-Rom drive held the machine back.

With its finances dwindling, the next few years would see SNK producing a string of niche-market arcade hits (including the *King Of Fighters* and *Metal Slug* series) as well as unsuccessfully marketing a double-speed CD-Rom version of its home console, the Neo-Geo CDZ. In 1997 it fruitlessly attempted to break



▲ *Mad Crasher* (Arcade, 1984) An impressive futuristic motorbike racing game in which you had to shoot other vehicles and jump gaps in the road.

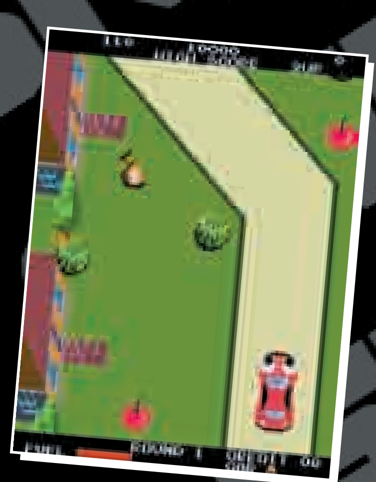
into the world of 3D with the release of its Hyper Neo-Geo 64 arcade board, then in 1999 it foolishly went up against Nintendo in the handheld console market, with the beautifully designed but under-supported Neo-Geo Pocket. With the debts building up at an alarming rate, parts of the business were hurriedly closed down (including the entire American sector), before the remainder of the company was bought out by Japanese Pachinko manufacturer Aruze in 2000.

For two years the company struggled on, but the many failed hardware attempts had taken their toll and, combined with internal arguments between SNK's management and its new parent company, they resulted in SNK going bankrupt by the end of October 2001. Despite this sad end to the SNK story, all the company's intellectual property was subsequently bought by Playmore, a new Japanese amusement company which continues to release further



▲ *Crystalis* (NES, 1990) Easily comparable to Nintendo's *Legend Of Zelda*, this was one of the few SNK games that didn't originate in the arcade.

instalments in the *King Of Fighters* and *Metal Slug* series. Amazingly, these new titles are not only making it to PS2, Dreamcast (in Japan) and GBA, but also to SNK's 13-year-old Neo-Geo AES home console. There's life in the old dog yet…



▲ *Joyful Road* (Arcade, 1983) The driving equivalent of *Paperboy* – collect fuel and food, avoid traffic and throw rubbish in the bins.

1994



This year sees the release of SNK's Neo-Geo CDZ. The console has the same graphics capabilities as the Neo-Geo AES, though the CD-Rom improves sound quality and provides cheaper games. A later double-speed version perks things up but can't compete with Sony's PlayStation.

1997



1997 sees SNK try to latch on to the new 3D trend with the Japanese release of the Hyper Neo-Geo 64 arcade board. But the technology is underpowered and SNK's programmers seem to have difficulty applying their skills in 3D. Not many games are released and the system only survives a few months.

1999



This year sees SNK release its Neo-Geo Pocket. Despite being a robust piece of kit, the monochrome screen looks a little out-of-date. A colour version is later released, but with virtually no third-party support, the system is quickly eclipsed by the popularity of Nintendo's Game Boy Color.

2000



In a financial hole after its many failed hardware attempts, SNK is bought out by Japanese Pachinko manufacturer, Aruze. Although under new ownership, the management remains the same and continues to make the same mistakes time and time again.

2001



After a tricky year plagued with internal disagreements, SNK finally files for bankruptcy. Thankfully, all the company's intellectual property is picked up by Playmore, and further instalments in some of SNK's most popular series continue to be released.



NEO ARCADE

SPECIFICATIONS

CPU (Central Processing Unit): 16-bit Motorola 68000
CPU Speed: 12MHz
Microprocessor: 8-bit Zilog-80A
Microprocessor Speed: 4MHz
Memory: Main RAM (Random Access Memory): 64KB
Video RAM: 68KB
Z80 RAM: 2KB
Resolution: 320 x 224
Sprites: Maximum Number Of Sprites On-Screen: 380
Maximum Sprite Size: 16 x 512 pixels
Minimum Sprite Size: 1 x 2 pixels
Maximum Amount Of Game Planes: 3
Colour: Colours Available: 65,536
Maximum Colours Displayed At Once: 4,096
Sound: Four Frequency Modulator (FM) Synthesis Channels, seven Digital Internal Channels, three Programmable Sound Generator (PSG) Channels and one Noise Channel

FOR MANY GAMERS THE 16-BIT ERA OFFERED SOME OF THE GREATEST GAMING EXPERIENCES TO DATE. FROM SUPER MARIO KART TO STREET FIGHTER II TURBO, SONIC THE HEDGEHOG TO FIFA 95, THE BATTLE BETWEEN NINTENDO AND SEGA WAS AN EPIC ONE THAT SPAWNED DOZENS OF CLASSIC TITLES. HOWEVER, THERE WAS A THIRD CONSOLE IN THIS RACE, AND IT WAS BY FAR THE MOST POWERFUL OF THE THREE.

During the early Nineties, while gamers argued over a blue hedgehog and an Italian plumber, the hardest of the hard-core game fans were having their own argument – was Terry or Andy Bogard the stronger of the two brothers? If you have no idea what we're talking about (which is likely if you're younger than 20 or older than 30), then the chances are you're not familiar with SNK's *Fatal Fury* (yep, that's SNK as in *SNK Vs Capcom*). Similar in style to *Street Fighter II*, the game was a one-on-one beat-'em-up featuring a cast of just three selectable characters – not a lot next to the likes of *Tekken* or *Virtua Fighter*, but still a healthy number in those days.

It's also fairly likely that if you ever got round to playing *Fatal Fury*, it was one the conversions that appeared later – the SNES, Mega Drive and even the Sharp X68000 all received competent, though severely cut-down, versions of the game. On the other hand, you may be finding us incredibly patronising, in which case you were probably one of the aforementioned 'hardest hard-core' gamers that didn't really give a toss if Mario or Sonic was the best. If so, you probably either owned a Neo-Geo, or are at least aware of the console's existence.

▶ Do bigger cartridges mean better games? In the case of *Samurai Shodown*, yes.

SNK's Neo-Geo Arcade Entertainment System (AES) was released on a rental-only basis in 1990, before becoming available to buy later that year. Based on the company's powerful 16-bit Neo-Geo Multi Video System (MVS) that had been released in the arcades a year earlier, the console was initially packaged with two four-button arcade joysticks and branded as Neo-Geo Gold. With a choice of either *NAM-1975* or *Baseball Stars Pro* included in the pack, the Neo-Geo Gold launched at a recommended retail price of $699 (£440) – vastly expensive, though actually quite a bargain considering that this was a cutting-edge arcade machine in a tidy plastic box.

However, while the machine itself was just about affordable for avid arcade players with a disposable income, the games were another story. Because of the enormous sprites and

-GEO

ENTERTAINMENT SYSTEM

RETRO
MICRO GAMES ACTION
Classic Machine

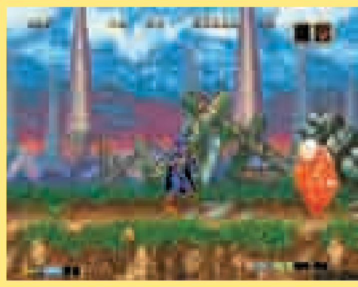
complex level of animation the hardware was capable of handling, the amount of memory required to store such imagery on cartridge was astronomical. Ranging from 46Megs up to over 700 in some of the later titles (compared to 16Megs for SNES *Street Fighter II*), the costs involved with manufacturing such monstrous carts meant that Neo-Geo games cost upwards of $200 (£130) each.

As you'd expect, these sorts of prices meant that the Neo-Geo was only ever embraced by a small (and usually very rich) sector of the games industry, even in Europe where the system was officially released, though poorly distributed by SNK Europe Ltd.

As few stores stocked the machine (even specialist retailers struggled to find suppliers), the Neo-Geo AES was predictably downtrodden by the SNES and Mega Drive in terms of sales. Even so, the machine has gone on to be one of the longest supported home consoles in history – even now at 13 years old, new instalments of the most popular franchises continue to be released for the virtually antique system. On top of that, many of the rarer games have become highly collectable, with some titles fetching over £1,000. Start saving…

LET THERE BE LIGHT

The games that led the way



MAGICIAN LORD

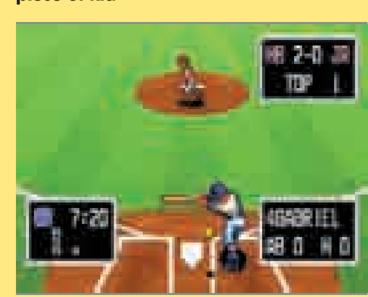
Publisher: **SNK**
Developer: **Alpha Denshi**

Although this was essentially a run and jump platformer, *Magician Lord* ably demonstrated the graphical abilities of SNK's new technology. The game featured a wizard named Elta who was faced with the tricky task of recovering eight books of wisdom from the clutches of Az Atorse, the god of destruction. Of course, being a wizard, Elta had the ability to change form (providing he collected the correct power-ups), but even so, the game was impossibly hard.

BASEBALL STARS PROFESSIONAL

Publisher: **SNK**
Developer: **In-House**

Following on from *Baseball Stars*, the SNK-developed sports title that had been released on the NES and in the arcades in 1989, *Baseball Stars Professional* introduced a vivid cartoon-style look to the series. This was one of the first three titles to appear on both the arcade MVS and home AES Neo-Geo platforms, and although it was hardly a must-have purchase, the visuals alone were enough to convince people that SNK's console was a tidy piece of kit.





▶ Similar in style to Red Corporation's *Cabal*, many gamers consider *NAM-1975* to be the superior title.

NAM-1975

Publisher: **SNK**
Developer: **In-House**

Considered to be a classic, *NAM-1975* initially disappointed some gamers because of its decidedly average visuals. However, those who stuck with the game soon discovered a solid, highly playable shoot-'em-up, featuring a terrific soundtrack and decent atmosphere. Like many of SNK's releases, *NAM-1975* wasn't the easiest game in the world, though the somewhat simplistic visuals meant that at least most of what went on was clear and concise.

NEO-GEO

ARCADE ENTERTAINMENT SYSTEM



THANKS FOR THE MEMORIES

SNK INTRODUCES THE MEMORY CARD, AHEAD OF SONY

One of the many underrated and often overlooked features of the Neo-Geo is the memory card slot on the front right-hand side of the machine. Just like with the PlayStation (and every other console since Sony's ingenious invention [sic]), memory cards were used for saving gameplay data (mostly high scores in those days) without the need for battery backed-up cartridges.

On top of that, the cards were also compatible with Neo-Geo MVS cabinets in the arcades, much like SEGA's Dreamcast/Naomi Visual Memory Units (VMU), meaning that data could easily be transferred between the two formats.

COMPACT DISC

CUT-PRICE GAMES, ADDED LOADING TIMES

In 1994, SNK managed to reduce the price of its Neo-Geo games by releasing a new version of its AES console that featured a single-speed CD drive, rather than a cartridge slot. Simply called the Neo-Geo CD, the system launched with a front-loading disc tray, though problems with reliability and high manufacture costs forced the company to amend the design a few months later. The new look Neo-Geo CD was a simple top-loader, and while this simplified version fixed the problems of the original design, it still had one major drawback – loading times.

This was partly to do with the fact that the single-speed CD-Rom drive simply wasn't up to the job, but also because of the memory-intensive nature of the sprite-based games. In order to load the massive amounts of data required for games such as *Metal Slug*, the system included a massive 7MB of on-board Dynamic Random Access Memory (DRAM) for the data to be loaded into (the original PlayStation had just 2.5MB, to give you some idea of how much we're talking about). Of course,



ADDITIONAL SPECIFICATIONS

Sound Processor: Yamaha 2610
Sound Channels: 13
Memory: 7MB DRAM (Dynamic Random Access Memory)



▶ **Only ever released in Japan, SNK's *Samurai Spirits* RPG didn't make it to the cartridge system.**

reading 7MB of information with a single-speed drive was a time-consuming process, and games would regularly take well over a minute to load each chunk. The wait was eased a little with a simple animated juggling monkey, but even we got sick of the sight of him eventually.

Again, SNK was forced to change the design of its CD system, and this time almost got it right with the double-speed Neo-Geo CDZ. Unfortunately, the machine was virtually overlooked next to the likes of the PlayStation, and only a handful were ever sold. As a final kick in the teeth for SNK (which was now beginning to struggle financially), it would soon be discovered that the new system was prone to breaking down. On top of that, some of the later games featured cut-down animation in order to fit into the hardware's 7MB of DRAM, while others simply wouldn't be ported in the first place.



Despite these issues, both the Neo-Geo CD and the Neo-Geo CDZ did have a couple of things going in their favour, the most obvious being the price of the games. At just $50 (£32) a pop, gamers wishing to play SNK's highly-acclaimed arcade titles could now pick them up for roughly a quarter of the price of the standard cartridge versions. Thanks to the CD-Rom technology, the games had improved sound quality and the machine could play regular music CDs.

TOP NEO-GEO TITLES

THE LAST 13 YEARS HAVE SEEN MANY SUPERB GAMES COMING OUT OF THE SNK (AND NOW PLAYMORE) OFFICES. TAKE A LOOK AT THESE BEAUTIES…

FATAL FURY

Launched in 1991 (the same year as *Street Fighter II*), SNK's *Fatal Fury* was, for many, the first reason to buy a Neo-Geo console. Featuring three selectable characters – Terry, Andy and Joe – the game boasted a range of special attacks and, though much of what was on offer seemed more basic than *Street Fighter II*, both games found their place side by side in the arcades.

One unique feature that this title had was two planes of battle – characters could jump into and out of the backgrounds, making play that little bit more strategic. Sadly, this wasn't overly popular with players and was removed from later instalments in the series.

Of course, no one could have predicted that 13 years later such abilities would be commonplace in beat-'em-ups, thanks to the introduction of polygons. Funnily enough, the feature still isn't overly popular with some gamers, but then neither are 3D fighting games in general.

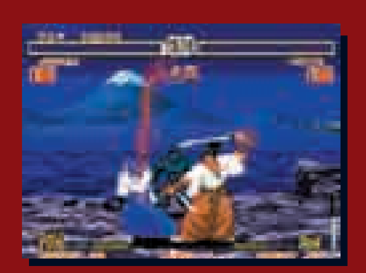


▲ *Street Fighter II* may have been the prettier of the two titles, but *Fatal Fury* was arguably more stylish.

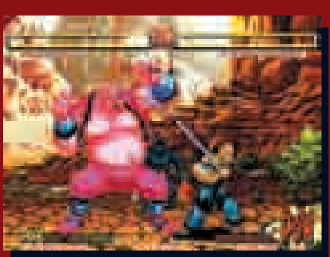


▲ As well as two planes to fight on, bouts also took place at different times of the day.

SAMURAI SHODOWN



▲ Spurting blood was popular with Japanese gamers, though it was removed in the American version.



▲ While many of *Samurai Shodown*'s characters were Japanese, Western influences were also included.

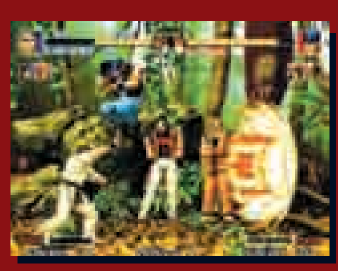
If you're unfamiliar with *Samurai Shodown* then the game may well look much like any other 2D beat-'em-up. However, its importance in the grand scheme of things is far more relevant than you might imagine. If the game had not existed, we may never have seen the likes of *Soul Blade* or *Soul Calibur*. You see, this weapon-based fighter was realised with such aplomb that it's gone on to influence just about every other similar title since its release in 1993.

Featuring 13 diverse and vividly designed fighters (12 selectable plus one boss), the game managed to achieve a level of beauty and elegance beyond pretty much every other fighting game that had gone before it. Thanks to the scaling abilities of the Neo-Geo hardware, the entire screen would zoom in and out depending on how far apart the fighters were, creating a dynamic and highly absorbing experience. Three sequels and many conversions have subsequently been released.

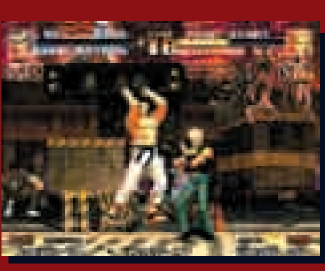
THE KING OF FIGHTERS

Bringing together the characters from *Fatal Fury* and *Art Of Fighting*, *The King Of Fighters* series proved that SNK was, and indeed still is, the, er, king of fighters. First introduced in 1994, the games took the best elements from all of SNK's other beat-'em-ups (along with a few of Capcom's) and fused them together in a gritty brawler with a slightly more realistic edge to it. Each level was presented with an artsy cut-scene, usually utilising at least one of the Neo-Geo's many graphical abilities, giving the game an unprecedented level of polish and front-end presentation.

Best of all, each player chose not one but three fighters that were used in succession (once one was knocked out, the next would take their place in the following round), which made the game quite unlike anything else. Other titles have borrowed this system since, of course, though few have done it as stylishly as SNK did nine years ago, and continues to do today.

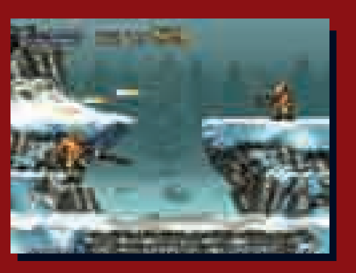


▲ Taking all the best elements from SNK's previous games, *KOF* was an instant hit with the fans.



▲ Although still not as well known as Chun-Li or Guile, SNK's characters are popular with gamers.

METAL SLUG



▲ Typically difficult, *Metal Slug* was certainly a money-spinner for SNK, which was struggling at the time.



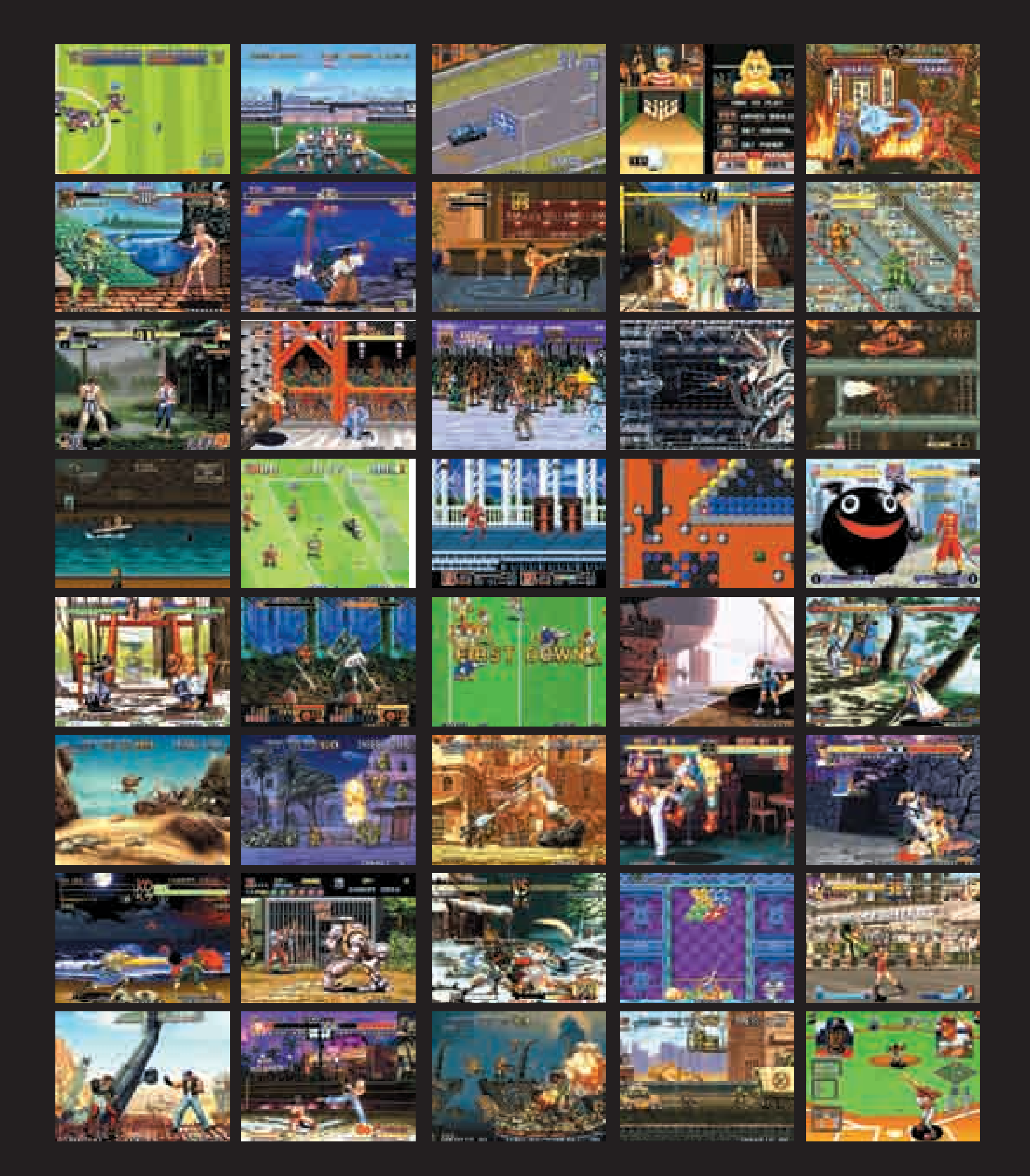
▲ The enormous amounts of memory used by *Metal Slug* allowed for some stunning animation.

Now one of the better-known Neo-Geo series, *Metal Slug* has been translated to numerous consoles over the years, including the Saturn and PlayStation (though the latter suffered from hideous loading times at various points during the levels). In fact, *Metal Slug 3* was supposed to launch on the PS2 this spring, though the game was pushed back indefinitely at the last minute.

In case you're not familiar with the series, *Metal Slug* was a scrolling arcade action game that mixed platform and shoot-'em-up elements in a frenzy of bullets, missiles and flying debris.

Featuring some of the most impressive animation ever likely in a 2D game (the *Metal Slug 3* cartridge weighed in at a massive 708Megs to accommodate all the frames), along with a decent two-player simultaneous mode, *Metal Slug* is undoubtedly one of the finest series to come from SNK.

SNK NEO-GEO



Classic Machine





GAMES THAT TIME FORGOT...

PREHISTORIC ISLE IN 1930

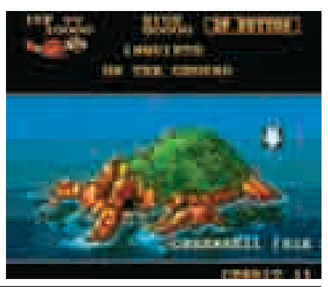
Planet-destroying motherships, aggressive alien scum and battle-scarred fighter planes are just a few of the antagonists that gamers have obliterated since the shoot-'em-up first appeared. Looking for something new to throw against the trigger-happy gamer, some bright spark at SNK came up with the neat idea of using prehistoric reptiles, with pretty impressive results…

While *Prehistoric Isle*'s plot was complete tripe (biplanes investigate strange occurrences in the Bermuda Triangle) the idea of using dinosaurs was sheer genius – gamers would spend many an hour blasting reptilian foes into oblivion. Once your credits were safely registered, you were immediately taken back to a time when parallax scrolling ruled the earth and the shoot-'em-up was king of whatever musty hovel you called your local arcade.



Prehistoric Isle wasn't a game for the faint hearted – the relentless onslaught of enemies tested the mettle of even the most hardened gamer. Pterodactyls would swarm towards you in uniform waves, intent on stopping your dangerous journey before it had even begun. Meanwhile, vicious carnivores ruled the lower half of the screen, leaping skywards in an attempt to catch out any player whose concentration had slipped for even a fraction of a second. Not content with cutting a swathe of destruction through the highly detailed landscapes, later levels saw you transforming into a submarine in order to continue your hectic battle underwater.





▲ Deeply unpleasant dinosaur types would attack you from the air and the ground. Hardly fair, is it?

As frantic as *Prehistoric Isle* may have been, the game's real highlight were the many bosses on each stage. From the plane-munching Brachiosaurus of the first level to the final encounter with the colossal Tyrannosaurus Rex, every beast was lovingly realised. Each boss was constructed using a series of separate sprites that made up their various arms, legs and other appendages – the end result was some extremely well-animated adversaries.

Unsurprisingly, with so many behemoths to bring down, weaponry was important to the intrepid dinosaur hunter. Shoot a floating egg and you'd uncover various icons – capturing a letter P would result in a pod attaching itself to your ship and immediately releasing a barrage of assorted firepower (see 'Going For A Spin').

Perhaps one of the strangest aspects of SNK's superb shooter was that it never got a home conversion. Unless you're lucky enough to own the original PCB board, MAME is your only other option – a crying shame as many gamers will have missed out on a very tasty slice of shoot-'em-up history.

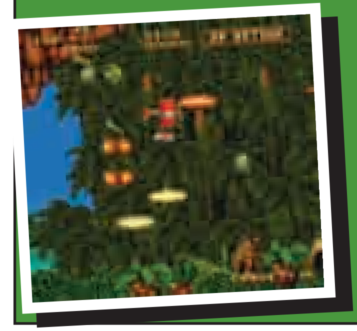


▲ Your reptilian enemies were wonderfully animated and would playfully rip the wings off your biplane.

GOING FOR A SPIN

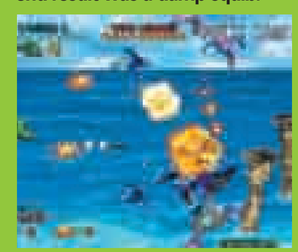
Prehistoric Isle featured a unique pod system with which to battle the increasing hordes of reptilian foes. Holding down the second fire button would allow you to rotate the pod attached to your biplane in one of eight directions. Once positioned, your plane was able to belch out fireballs, bombs and (best of all) a destructive wall of flame that would incinerate anything that came near it.

Collecting additional power-up icons enhanced each of your weapons to ridiculous extremes – perfect for frying those tough bosses. The pod system was so popular that it was retained for the sequel and improved for Capcom's planet-friendly *Eco Fighters*.



EXTINCTION'S TOO GOOD…

Hoping to replicate the success of the original, Yumekobo's follow-up was a major departure from the first *Prehistoric Isle* and disappointed many fans of the original. Although it introduced the choice between spread and single shots, as well as the ability to rescue stranded civilians, á la *Choplifter*, it lacked the charm and finesse of the first game. Even the many bosses failed to capture the jaw-dropping moments of the original – the end result was a damp squib.



Presentation	75%
Graphics	88%
Playability	95%
Addictive qualities	95%
OVERALL	91%



PREHISTORIC ISLE (Arcade) Original arcade flyer, 1989



16-BIT GRAPHICAL EFFECTS

The 16-bit era saw some rudimentary 3D action, mostly on the SNES thanks to its revolutionary chipset

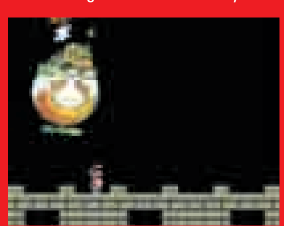
PARALLAX SCROLLING

Parallax scrolling involved separating 2D backgrounds into two or more layers so the scenery could be scrolled at different speeds to create a greater impression of depth.



SPRITE ROTATION

By using this technique, developers could smoothly rotate characters through 360 degrees without drawing separate frames of animation, which saved a huge amount of memory.



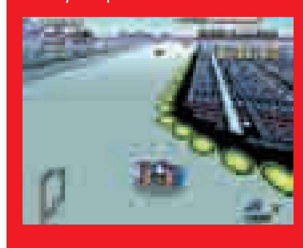
SPRITE ENLARGEMENT/REDUCTION

Sprite enlargement and reduction saved memory space by allowing the developers to draw a single object and increase or decrease its size. A gimmick that was often over-used.



MODE 7 LANDSCAPING

Mode 7 was a method of processing 2D images on a 3D grid. Titles such as *F-Zero* and *Super Mario Kart* looked great even though the vehicles were merely 2D sprites.





▲ The rotating tunnel was a bit clunky, but still awesome for its time.

S·U·P·E·R C·A·S·T·L·E·V·A·N·I·A IV

When gamers received the fourth instalment of the *Castlevania* franchise in 1991, many were initially disappointed. After the atmospheric menu screens the game itself was rather garish and sported some of the worst sprite animation on the SNES. However, this was *Castlevania* and no matter how hilarious Simon Belmont looked as he moonwalked up stairs, the game demanded to be played to within an inch of its life.

Spurred on by its majestic orchestral score, later levels saw improvements to the game's visuals and some of the most imaginative use of Mode 7 yet seen on the console. The magic began as Belmont entered an empty room…

Finding no available exit and wary of the spikes protruding from the walls, it seemed inevitable that our intrepid hero would have to retreat. Suddenly and without warning the whole room started to rotate. Quickly ensnaring a convenient grapple point with his whip, Belmont swung crazily like a pendulum. The room eventually came to a halt leaving just enough time to whip a few Medusa heads (like you do) before rotating one final time.

The next stage consisted of a cylindrical tunnel that spun round as Belmont fought through it. Okay, so there may have been slowdown but it didn't matter, the effect looked simply amazing and was a great showpiece for the SNES.

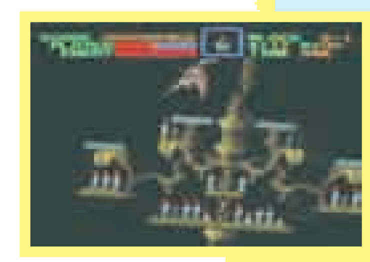
Even monsters received a healthy dose of Mode 7 magic, with the Rock Golem being the most memorable example. The more Simon hit it the smaller it got – its eventual demise saw the critter fill the screen then rapidly diminish into oblivion.

The standout moment, however, was your perilous journey across the top of the massive chandeliers. From the second you first set eyes on the moving lights to the moment you were safely back on firm ground, the effect was superb.

Super Castlevania IV's reputation was intact and, along with *Symphony Of The Night*, still represents the best the series has offered budding vampire hunters.



▲ Swashbuckling, light-fitting-leaping at its best.





▼ Land on those and you won't see the chandelier…



KEEPING IT IN THE FAMILY

GAMES™ LOOKS AT THE HEROES OF CASTLEVANIA

The Belmonts and their friends have been whip-cracking away for years. Our guide to their exploits, including Japanese and American versions, is the ultimate Castlevania Who's Who…

Alucard

APPEARED IN: *Castlevania Legends, Castlevania III: Dracula's Curse, Castlevania: Symphony of the Night*
FORMATS: GB, NES, PSone, Saturn
WEAPON OF CHOICE: *Dracula's Curse*: Fireball, *Symphony of the Night*: fists
BIO: Alucard is Dracula's son and shares many of his powers, but he retains the goodness of his mother, Lisa.

Christopher Belmont

APPEARED IN: *Castlevania Adventure, Castlevania II: Belmont's Revenge*
FORMATS: Game Boy
WEAPON OF CHOICE: Whip
BIO: Christopher has fought Dracula twice. His second quest involved finding his missing son.

Juste Belmont

APPEARED IN: *Castlevania: Harmony Of Dissonance*
FORMAT: Game Boy Advance
WEAPON OF CHOICE: Morning Star
BIO: The possible great grandson of Simon Belmont, Juste was able to imbue weapons with Spell Fusion.

Richter Belmont

APPEARED IN: *Dracula X: Circle of Blood, Castlevania: Vampire's Kiss, Castlevania: Symphony of the Night*
FORMAT: Turbo-Duo PC Engine, SNES, PlayStation, Saturn
WEAPON OF CHOICE: Whip
BIO: Richter was enticed to evil by the priest Shaft in *Symphony Of The Night*

Simon Belmont

APPEARED IN: *Vampire Killer, Castlevania, Haunted Castle, Castlevania II: Simon's Quest, Super Castlevania IV, Castlevania Chronicles, Harmony Of Dissonance*
FORMATS: MSX2, NES, Arcade, SNES, Sharp X68000, PlayStation, GBA
WEAPON OF CHOICE: Whip
BIO: Simon is the most prolific Belmont, appearing in seven games.

Sonia Belmont

APPEARED IN: *Castlevania Legends*
FORMAT: Game Boy
WEAPON OF CHOICE: Whip
BIO: According to family history, but not game order, Sonia was the first Belmont to appear in the *Castlevania* legend.

Trevor Belmont

APPEARED IN: *Castlevania III: Dracula's Curse*
FORMAT: NES
WEAPON OF CHOICE: Whip
BIO: Trevor is rumoured to be the son of Sonia Belmont and Alucard. He later married Sypha Belnades.

Sypha Belnades

APPEARED IN: *Castlevania III: Dracula's Curse*
FORMAT: NES
WEAPON OF CHOICE: Warakiya Staff
BIO: Sypha was rescued from a Cyclops by Trevor Belmont. They later married.

Cornell

APPEARED IN: *Castlevania: Legacy Of Darkness*
FORMAT: N64
WEAPON OF CHOICE: Energy Scythe
BIO: Cornell could turn into a werewolf, but sacrificed his ability to save his sister.

Grant Danasty

APPEARED IN: *Castlevania III: Dracula's Curse*
FORMAT: NES
WEAPON OF CHOICE: Dagger
BIO: Grant was cursed by Dracula and had to guard a clocktower in Warakiya. The curse was broken when Trevor defeated him.

Carrie Fernandez

APPEARED IN: *Castlevania 64, Castlevania: Legacy of Darkness*
FORMAT: N64
WEAPON OF CHOICE: Homing Ball
BIO: A direct descendant of Sypha Belnades, Carrie has magical powers.

Nathan Graves

APPEARED IN: *Castlevania: Circle Of The Moon*
FORMAT: Game Boy Advance
WEAPON OF CHOICE: Whip
BIO: Despite his surname, Nathan is a Belmont. He defeated his possessed friend before destroying Dracula.

Maxim Kischine

APPEARED IN: *Castlevania: Harmony Of Dissonance*
FORMAT: Game Boy Advance
WEAPON OF CHOICE: Stellar Sword
BIO: Maxim became jealous of Juste when he was chosen to defeat Dracula. After training, however, Maxim was possessed by Dracula.

Eric LeCarde

APPEARED IN: *Castlevania: Bloodlines*
FORMAT: Mega Drive
WEAPON OF CHOICE: Alcarde Spear
BIO: Eric was good friends with John Morris and later scoured the world hunting for Dracula's true place of rising.

John Morris

APPEARED IN: *Castlevania: Bloodlines*
FORMAT: Mega Drive
WEAPON OF CHOICE: Whip
BIO: John was a boy when he saw his father, Quincy, kill Dracula. John followed in his father's footsteps.

Henry Oldrey

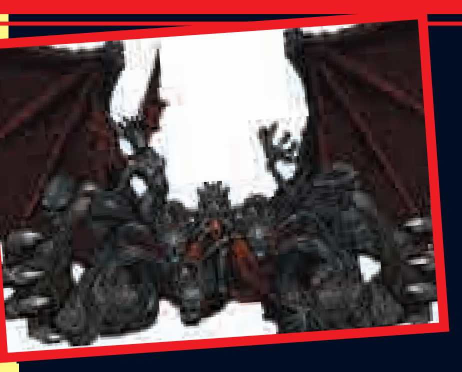
APPEARED IN: *Castlevania: Legacy Of Darkness*
FORMAT: N64
WEAPON OF CHOICE: Six-Shot Pistol
BIO: After watching his father turn into a vampire, Henry entered Dracula's castle to free many enslaved children.

Maria Renard

APPEARED IN: *Dracula X: Circle of Blood, Castlevania: Vampire's Kiss, Castlevania: Symphony Of The Night*
FORMAT: Turbo-Duo PC Engine, SNES, PlayStation, Saturn
WEAPON OF CHOICE: Doves
BIO: Maria was Richter's sister-in-law. Although able to use powerful magic, she was kidnapped twice by Dracula.

Reinhardt Schneider

APPEARED IN: *Castlevania 64, Castlevania: Legacy of Darkness*
FORMAT: N64
WEAPON OF CHOICE: Whip
BIO: Reinhardt fell in love with the vampire Rosa. Defeating Dracula allowed Rosa's spirit to return to her body.



GREAT GAME BOSSES

DRACULA: THE ETERNAL NEMESIS

The infernal Prince of Darkness has haunted the Belmont family for the last 17 years. Although he first appeared in Konami's *Haunted Castle*, he didn't get properly acquainted with gamers until *Castlevania* on the NES. Being undead he made the perfect boss, as there was always someone foolish enough to resurrect him again.

As the series progressed, Dracula's powers became more impressive – he could morph into various demons, and the incarnation found in *Symphony Of The Night* tested even the most hard-core of *Castlevania* fans. What he'll look like in the new PS2 game is anyone's guess, but you can be sure of one thing – it won't be the last time we'll see him…



▶ Frankly, with a cape like that you've not got much option but to go around terrorising virgins and the like.

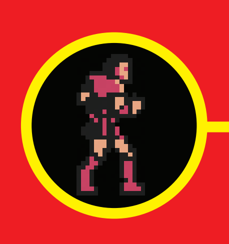




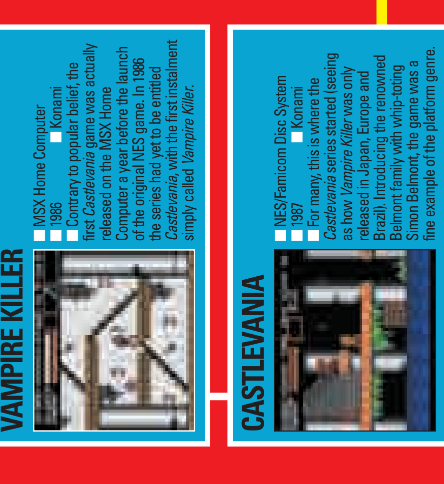
CASTLEVANIA FAMILY TREE

The Belmont family has a long and distinguished history of vampire hunting, with almost every generation cracking their whips in order to destroy Dracula. But you know what? He just won't die…

When we first played *Castlevania* on the NES all those years ago, no-one stopped to consider that we might still be enjoying the game two decades down the line, but here we, although our gothically windswept hair is fast receding. During that time, videogames have seen all sorts of developments and, while the *Castlevania* series has been affected by this evolution (the two games released on N64 were 3D, for instance), the current style remains much unchanged since its conception. As far as platform adventures go, the *Castlevania* series continues to be among the most balanced and well-structured examples available, combining solid, compelling gameplay with striking art and beautifully realised classical/rock music compositions. So let's take a look at the history of one of the few non-Nintendo or SEGA classic series to make it through four hardware generations.



VAMPIRE KILLER



- MSX Home Computer
- 1986
- Konami
- Contrary to popular belief, the first *Castlevania* game was actually released on the MSX Home Computer a year before the launch of the original NES game. In 1986 the series had yet to be entitled *Castlevania*, with the first instalment simply called *Vampire Killer*.

CASTLEVANIA

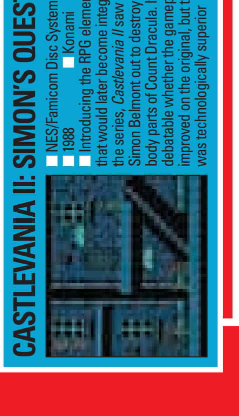


- NES/Famicom Disc System
- 1987
- Konami
- For many, this is where the *Castlevania* series started (seeing as how *Vampire Killer* was only released in Japan, Europe and Brazil). Introducing the renowned Belmont family with whip-toting Simon Belmont, the game was a fine example of the platform genre.

ARCADE

PARODIES

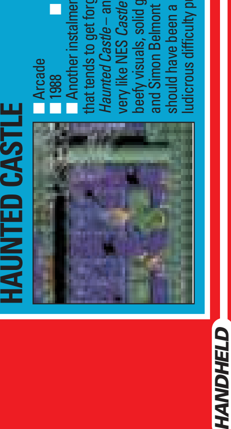
CASTLEVANIA II: SIMON'S QUEST



- NES/Famicom Disc System
- 1988
- Konami
- Introducing the RPG elements that would later become integral to the series, *Castlevania II* saw Simon Belmont out to destroy the body parts of Count Dracula. It's debatable whether the gameplay improved on the original, but this was technologically superior

HAUNTED CASTLE





- Arcade
- 1988
- Konami
- Another instalment in the series that tends to get forgotten is *Haunted Castle* – an arcade game very like NES *Castlevania*. With beefy visuals, solid game design and Simon Belmont in action, this should have been a hit. Sadly, its ludicrous difficulty put punters off.

WAI WAI WORLD



- Famicom
- 1988
- Konami
- Only ever released in Japan, *Wai Wai World* wasn't strictly a *Castlevania* game. In a fusion of Konami games you controlled Konami Man as he rescued popular Konami characters from the clutches of evil aliens. One of those kidnapped was Simon Belmont.

HANDHELD

CASTLEVANIA III: DRACULA'S CURSE



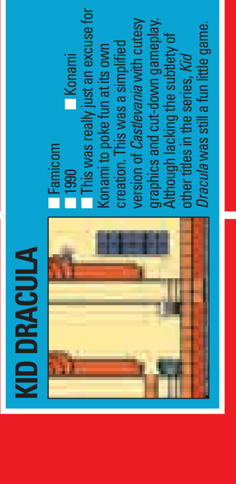
- NES
- 1989
- Konami
- Introducing Trevor C. Belmont as the new main character, *Castlevania III* was set a hundred years before the original game. Removing the RPG elements of *Simon's Quest*, *Dracula's Curse* featured 16 platform levels played out in succession.

THE CASTLEVANIA ADVENTURE



- Game Boy
- 1989
- Konami
- The first Game Boy *Castlevania* game should have been easy for Konami to produce. Sadly, a number of the key gameplay factors (such as heart collecting) had been left out, making this a humdrum, and at times horribly frustrating, platform gaming experience.

KID DRACULA



- Famicom
- 1990
- Konami
- This was really just an excuse for Konami to poke fun at its own creation. This was a simplified version of *Castlevania* with cutesy graphics and cut-down gameplay. Although lacking the subtlety of other titles in the series, *Kid Dracula* was still a fun little game.

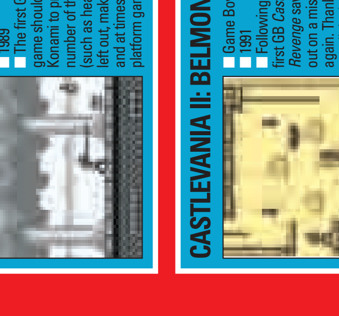
SUPER CASTLEVANIA IV

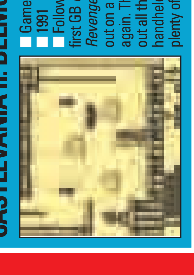




- Super Nintendo
- 1991
- Konami
- Still the favourite *Castlevania* game with many of the fans, this was more a remake of the first NES title than a totally new product. But the additional graphics processing power and special effects offered by the SNES meant that everything was bigger and better than before.

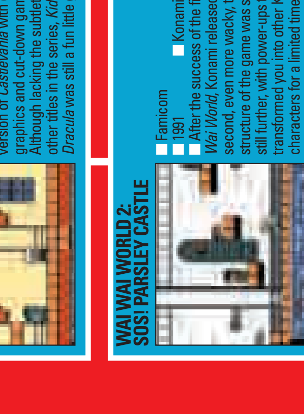
CASTLEVANIA II: BELMONT'S REVENGE

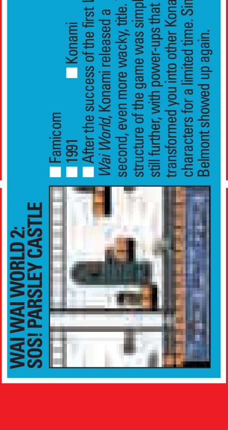




- Game Boy
- 1991
- Konami
- Following on directly from the first GB *Castlevania* title, *Belmont's Revenge* saw Christopher Belmont out on a mission to destroy Dracula again. Thankfully, Konami ironed out all the imperfections in its first handheld attempt, even putting in plenty of visual detail.

WAI WAI WORLD 2: SOS! PARSLEY CASTLE





- Famicom
- 1991
- Konami
- After the success of the first *Wai Wai World*, Konami released a second, even more wacky, title. The structure of the game was simplified still further, with power-ups that transformed you into other Konami characters for a limited time. Simon Belmont showed up again.

AKUMAJO DRACULA X68000

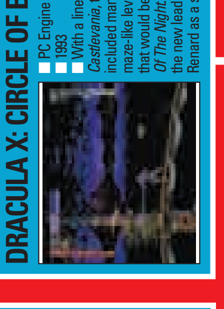
- Sharp X68000
- 1993
- Konami
- *Akumajo Dracula X68000* was only released in Japan on the Sharp X68000. Very like the first NES game in terms of structure and layout, this obscure title was re-released in both original and enhanced forms as *Castlevania Chronicles* on the PSone in 2001.

CASTLEVANIA: THE NEW GENERATION



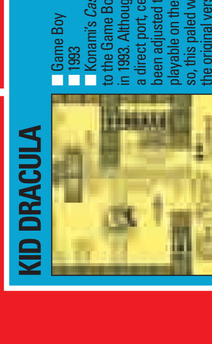
- Mega Drive
- 1994
- Konami
- After initially shunning the Mega Drive in favour of the SNES, Konami later brought some of its best titles to the SEGA console. Also known as *Castlevania Bloodlines* and *Vampire Killer*, *Castlevania: TNG* introduced two new heroes – John Morris and Eric Lecarde.

DRACULA X: CIRCLE OF BLOOD



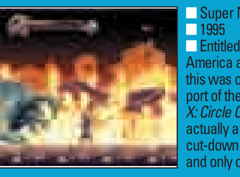
- PC Engine
- 1993
- Konami
- With a linear structure like NES *Castlevania*, this Japanese-only title included many secret rooms and maze-like level layouts – something that would be integral to *Symphony Of The Night*. Richter Belmont was the new leading man, with Maria Renard as a selectable character.

KID DRACULA

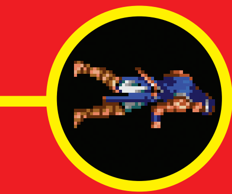


- Game Boy
- 1993
- Konami
- Konami's *Castlevania* spoof came to the Game Boy in cut-down form in 1993. Although it was essentially a direct port, certain areas had been adjusted to make them more playable on the small screen. Even so, this paled when compared to the original version.

CASTLEVANIA: VAMPIRE KISS

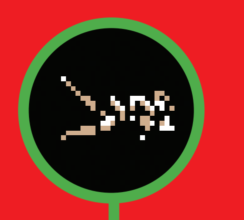


- Super Nintendo
- 1995
- Konami
- Entitled *Castlevania: Dracula X* in America and *Dracula XX* in Japan, this was originally thought to be a port of the PC Engine game, *Dracula X: Circle Of Blood*. But it was actually a pseudo follow-up with cut-down graphics, no power-ups and only one playable character.

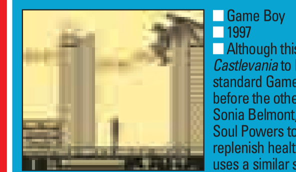


CASTLEVANIA: SYMPHONY OF THE NIGHT

- PSone
- 1997
- Konami
- Arguably the best *Castlevania* game in the series, this sprawling non-linear adventure featured the largest number of power-ups and secret items of any *Castlevania* game. It had superb art, animation and level structure, as well as some of the greatest game music ever.



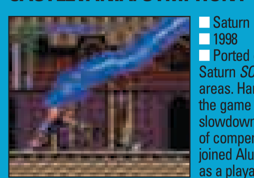
CASTLEVANIA: LEGENDS



- Game Boy
- 1997
- Konami
- Although this was the last *Castlevania* to be released on the standard Game Boy, the story set it before the other two. Playing as Sonia Belmont, you could use new Soul Powers to attack enemies or replenish health. *Aria Of Sorrow* uses a similar system.

3D

CASTLEVANIA: SYMPHONY OF THE NIGHT

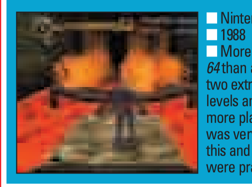


- Saturn
- 1998
- Konami
- Ported directly from the PSone, Saturn *SOTN* suffered in a few key areas. Hardware differences meant the game was plagued by slowdown and ugly effects. By way of compensation, Maria Renard joined Alucard and Richter Belmont as a playable character.

CASTLEVANIA 64

- Nintendo 64
- 1998
- Konami
- This was the first 3D *Castlevania* game and, while it lacked atmosphere, steady pacing and thoughtful art direction meant it actually worked quite well. Sadly, it was let down by impossible camera angles and a few poorly designed levels.

CASTLEVANIA: LEGACY OF DARKNESS



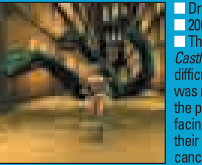
- Nintendo 64
- 1988
- Konami
- More of a remix of *Castlevania 64* than a new game, *LOD* featured two extra characters, two extra levels and was tweaked to make it more playable. Graphically there was very little difference between this and *C64* – in fact, some arenas were practically untouched.

REMAKE

CASTLEVANIA CHRONICLES

- PSone
- 2001
- Konami
- Based on *Akumajo Dracula X68000*, this PSone remake shared many similarities with the NES *Castlevania*. Illustrator Ayami Kojima had already co-developed the new style seen in *SOTN*, and *Castlevania Chronicles* benefited from her creative input.

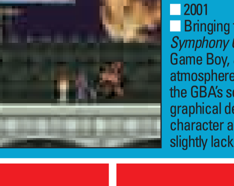
CASTLEVANIA RESURRECTION



- Dreamcast
- 2000
- Konami
- This promising 3D incarnation of *Castlevania* was plagued with difficulties. At a late stage, Konami was recruiting new staff to work on the project, hinting that the problems facing the initial team were beyond their control. The game was finally cancelled in March 2000.

CASTLEVANIA: CIRCLE OF THE MOON





- Game Boy Advance
- 2001
- Konami
- Bringing the style and structure of *Symphony Of The Night* to the new Game Boy, *COTM* had a moody atmosphere. Sadly, the dullness of the GBA's screen meant much of the graphical detail was lost, and poor character animation resulted in a slightly lacklustre overall feel.

KONAMI KRAZY RACING

- Game Boy Advance
- 2001
- Konami
- Known as *Wai Wai Racing* in Japan, this *Mario Kart* clone featured a range of Konami characters, each with their own themed levels. Although the overall feel was bright and cheerful, *Castlevania*'s Dracula appeared as an unlikely wacky racer.

REMAKE

KONAMI'S COLLECTOR'S SERIES: CASTLEVANIA AND CONTRA

- PC
- 2002
- Konami
- This was merely a selection pack of *Castlevania* and *Contra* games, converted to be compatible with Windows. All three NES games were featured along with the original *Contra* and *Super C*. Wisely, Konami kept each game in its original form.

CASTLEVANIA: HARMONY OF DISSONANCE



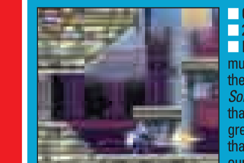
- Game Boy Advance
- 2002
- Konami
- After complaints about the dark visuals in the first GBA *Castlevania*, Konami used a more vivid colour palette the second time round. Again non-linear in structure, *HOD* had greatly enhanced character animation, though the music and sound effects were strangely weak.

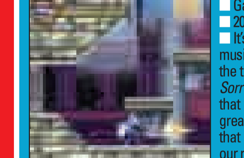
CASTLEVANIA [WORKING TITLE]



- PS2
- 2004 (TBC)
- Konami
- So what can we tell you about the latest instalment in the *Castlevania* series? Well, we know that it will be in 3D (though hopefully better than those N64 outings) and has been designed to appeal to new players as well as hardcore fans. See page 68 for more.

CASTLEVANIA: ARIA OF SORROW





- Game Boy Advance
- 2003
- Konami
- It's got the art, the animation, the music, and it should be available by the time you read this. *Aria Of Sorrow* encapsulates every element that makes the *Castlevania* series great in a non-linear adventure title that rivals the quality of *SOTN*. See our review on page 102.

GAME: Castlevania Dracula X
FORMAT: SNES
USED: In America
ARTIST: Unknown
MEDIA: Watercolour paint, acrylic paint, watercolour pencil

GAME: Castlevania/Vampire Killer
FORMAT: NES/MSX Home Computer
USED: Worldwide
ARTIST: Unknown
MEDIA: Watercolour paint, watercolour pencil, oil pastel

The Gallery

There isn't much videogame artwork that could comfortably hang next to the likes of Van Gogh or Monet, but then not all games share the same level of artistic creativity as Konami's Castlevania…

Since its introduction in 1986, the *Castlevania* series has always featured the sort of creative design that most videogame developers could only dream of. The quality has sometimes varied between sublime and passable as different individuals have come and gone from the teams over the years, but even the worst-looking *Castlevania* games have offered something to wow their players.

Take *Castlevania IV* on the SNES, for example. It was hardly the best-looking SNES game – Simon Belmont looked a like he was made from Lego and the animation left a lot to be desired – but the way that Konami cleverly integrated traditional 2D drawings with early 3D manipulation was truly a sight to behold. This method of blending art and technology can be seen even more clearly in *Castlevania: Symphony Of The Night* on the PSone. While most of the game was simply scrolling 2D drawings, other sections applied similar imagery to the faces of polygons to give the backgrounds a pseudo 3D look. And while Alucard (the main character) was a 2D sprite as in all the older *Castlevania* games, his limbs were animated independently and used Super Nintendo-style rotation techniques to ensure that movement was as fluid as possible.

Symphony Of The Night was an artistic masterpiece in other ways too; the concept art, character portraits and illustrations all had a level of finish way beyond that of most videogames, thanks to the input of

GAME: Castlevania: Harmony Of Dissonance
FORMAT: Game Boy Advance
USED: Worldwide
ARTIST: Ayami Kojima
MEDIA: Watercolour paint, acrylic paint, watercolour pencil



GAME: Akumajo Dracula X68000
FORMAT: Sharp X68000
USED: In Japan
ARTIST: Unknown
MEDIA: Watercolour paint, watercolour pencil



GAME: Castlevania: Symphony Of The Night
FORMAT: Saturn
USED: In Japan
ARTIST: Ayami Kojima
MEDIA: Watercolour paint, acrylic paint, watercolour pencil, oil pastel

GAME: Castlevania: Symphony Of The Night
FORMAT: PSone
USED: In Japan & Europe
ARTIST: Ayami Kojima
MEDIA: Watercolour paint, acrylic paint, watercolour pencil

GAME: Castlevania: Harmony Of Dissonance
FORMAT: Game Boy Advance
USED: In America
ARTIST: Ayami Kojima
MEDIA: Watercolour paint, acrylic paint, watercolour pencil

GAME: Castlevania: Aria Of Sorrow
FORMAT: Game Boy Advance
USED: Worldwide
ARTIST: Ayami Kojima
MEDIA: Watercolour paint, watercolour pencil

Japanese illustrator Ayami Kojima. Unfortunately, not every wing of Konami picked up Kojima's remarkable abilities – Konami Of America chose to go with a lousy cut-out photo of some lightning over a castle for the game's box, rather than any of the stunning designs coming from the company's Japanese sector. Thankfully, Kojima's character drawings were used inside the manual, and every subsequent *Castlevania* game has used the Japanese illustrations on the cover.

But this vastly differing box art quality isn't only something that affected *Symphony Of The Night*. With the *Castlevania* series now spanning more than 17 years, the influences and styles have changed drastically as different trends have gone in and out of fashion. Whatever the quality of the final designs though, almost every *Castlevania* box has featured some sort of imagery that makes you want to play the game.

From the He-Man meets Conan Eighties fantasy look used for *Akumajo Dracula X68000*, right through to Kojima's angelic imagery in the latest games, *Castlevania* is one videogame series that encapsulates the sort of diversity and experimentation that few games can match today. And that's before we've even started to discuss the music…

Ayami Kojima

Becoming a character portrait artist and illustrator for a series as prolific as *Castlevania* can't be an easy task, though that was what faced Ayami Kojima when Konami hired her to bring a new look to *Castlevania: Symphony Of The Night*. Already known in Japan for creating the cover art for a Samurai novel collection by Miho Mizuno, Kojima's artwork ranges from cartoon portraits through to swirling montages realised with a mixture of media.

Early works use abstract imagery to represent diseases or death, while her regular use of white feathers, angel wings and spiritual beings seems to represent a dimension somewhere between heaven and hell. Some of her pieces take this religious influence one step further – one of her more vivid creations shows a bloodied Jesus with his heart in his hand. This gothic and occasionally grim style is probably why Konami considered her work suitable for *Castlevania*.



CLASSIC CONSOLES BUYERS GUIDE

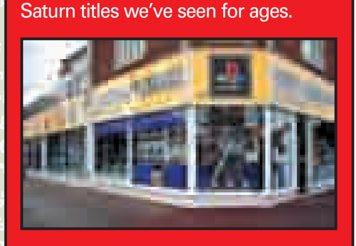
I'D BUY THAT FOR A DOLLAR

SPECIALIST RETAILERS

What's it called? RAVEN GAMES
Where can I find it? South of London in a little place called Beckenham.
Web Address: www.ravengames.co.uk
What can I buy there? This Aladdin's cave of goodies stocks rare Japanese gaming trinkets, as well as a range of retro games and systems, including a selection of arcade titles.



What's it called? VIDEO GAME CENTRE
Where can I find it? Bournemouth
Web Address: www.videogamecentre.co.uk
What can I buy there? The store stocks an enormous selection of games. It has the most comprehensive collection of SNES, Mega Drive and Saturn titles we've seen for ages.



What's it called? CeX (COMPUTER EXCHANGE)
Where can I find it? There are 11 CeX shops around the country
Web Address: www.cex.co.uk
What can I buy there? CeX stocks an impressive selection of UK and imported games and consoles, including specialist items like like arcade PCBs and Neo Geo MVS carts.



This is a basic list of the sort of prices you can expect to pay for the more popular retro gaming systems. Obviously, these can vary wildly but these prices are intended to be a rough guideline so you can tell if you're getting a bargain or being unscrupulously fleeced.

3DO

Panasonic 3DO	£60
Goldstar 3DO	£50-60

ACORN COMPUTERS

BBC Micro	£50
Acorn Electron	£40

AMSTRAD

Amstrad CPC 464	£20
Amstrad CPC 664	£20-25
Amstrad CPC 6128	£25
Amstrad GX4000	£50

ATARI

Atari VCS 2600	£30 (wooden models tend to cost more)
Atari ST	£40 (with software)
Atari Lynx	£35 (the original model costs less)
Atari Jaguar	£25

COMMODORE

Commodore Vic 20	£15-20
Commodore 64	£25-35 (varies according to model)
Commodore Amiga	£35-40 (varies according to model)
Commodore CDTV	£50-60
C64GS	£50 (becoming more sought-after)
Commodore CD32	£35

MISC

GCE Vectrex (General Consumer Electronics)	£200-250
MB Vectrex (Milton Bradley)	£175-200
JAMMA compatible cabinets	£100-350 (depending on model)
Supergun	£150-200 (varies according to model)

NEC

PC Engine	£70-80
Turbo Grafx-16	£50-60
Turbo Duo	£100-150
PC Engine GT	£150-200
Super Grafx	£200-250

NINTENDO

Game & Watch	£15-50 (depending on title)
Nintendo Entertainment System	£15-20
Game Boy/Game Boy Pocket	£10
Game Boy Color	£15
Super Nintendo	£20-25
Virtual Boy	£75-100
Nintendo 64	£20-25

SEGA

Master System	£20
Mega Drive	£20-25
Game Gear	£35-40
Mega CD	£40-60
SEGA 32X	£30
SEGA Nomad	£75-100
SEGA Saturn	£30
Dreamcast	£25-30

SINCLAIR

Sinclair ZX-81	£40
ZX Spectrum 48K	£40-50
ZX Spectrum +	£30
ZX Spectrum 128K	£40
ZX Spectrum +2	£35
ZX Spectrum +3	£40

SNK

Neo Geo MVS Single Slot (Arcade system)	£70 (prices for multi-slots are higher)
Neo Geo AES (home system)	£175-225
Neo Geo CD	£125-175
Neo Geo CDZ	£150-175
Neo Geo Pocket Color	£40-50



Buy & sell your retro games with games™

ITEMS FOR SALE

Lot 01
Tazmania for SEGA Mega Drive: Boxed with manual in good condition **£5 including unregistered postage plus packaging** Poole

Lot 02
King Of Fighters '94 for Neo-Geo AES: Boxed with manual, though the casing is slightly cracked **£45 including special delivery plus packaging** Poole

Lot 03
Super Mario Kart (PAL version) for Super Nintendo: Boxed, but no instructions **£18 including postage and packaging** Oxford

Lot 04
Commodore 64 plus 50 games: Good working order, unboxed machine, mostly boxed games **£40, buyer to collect** Leeds

Lot 05
Sexy Parodius (Jap) for SEGA Saturn: Boxed in mint condition **£35 plus postage and packaging** London

Lot 06
Daytona (PAL version) for SEGA Saturn: Average condition, includes manual **£4 including postage and packaging** Weymouth

Lot 07
Alien Trilogy (PAL version) for SEGA Saturn: Good condition, with manual **£4 including postage and packaging** Weymouth

Lot 08
Soul Blade (PAL version) for PSone: Slightly scratched disc, but works fine, boxed plus instructions **£15** Leicester

WANTED

***Wanted 01 –** Castlevania: Symphony Of The Night* (PAL) for PSone
Must include box and manual
Bournemouth

***Wanted 02 –** King Of Fighters Dream Match* 1999 (Jap) for SEGA Dreamcast
Must include box and manual
Bournemouth

***Wanted 03 –** StarLancer* (PAL) for SEGA Dreamcast
Must include box and manual
Bournemouth

***Wanted 04 –** Last Blade 2 FE* (Jap) for SEGA Dreamcast
Must include box and manual
Bournemouth

***Wanted 05 –** Garou: Mark Of The Wolves* for Neo-Geo AES
Must include box and manual
Poole

Wanted 06 – Capcom CPSII arcade PCBs
Any considered
Poole

Wanted 07 – Dreamcast dance mat
All considered, but must be in good condition and full working order
Bournemouth

SELLING
To sell items on gBay, simply list the following details in an email to: gbay@paragon.co.uk
- Your name
- Your age (you must be over 18)
- Your home address and telephone number (don't worry – this is strictly confidential and will not be given out)
- Your email address
- The item(s) you wish to sell (a maximum of five per month please)
- The condition of the item(s) you wish to sell
- How much you want for the item(s)

Each item will then be allocated a lot number and listed on gBay, along with your region in the UK.

BUYING
To buy an item from gBay, all you have to do is list the following details in an email to: gbay@paragon.co.uk
- Your name
- Your age (you must be over 18)
- Your home address and telephone number (don't worry – this is strictly confidential and will not be given out)
- Your email address
- The reference number for the item you're interested in

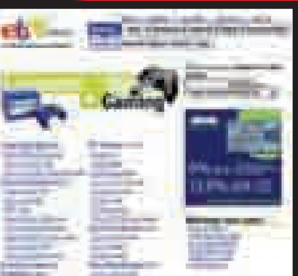
WANTED
If you're simply trying to get hold of a long-desired item, contact us in the same way as above stating what you want and any preferences on its condition or price.

After contacting us, your email address will be passed onto the relevant seller or buyer, who will contact you directly to complete the deal, arrange payment and make plans for postage, collection or delivery. Please note that this runs purely on a first come, first served basis.

GBAY RULES AND SMALL PRINT
This is a service for private sellers, not dealers. gBay is for sales of retro games only – no post-Dreamcast consoles or games allowed. There's little point in advertising Mega Drive *FIFA* games as everybody already has at least two copies. Paragon Publishing Ltd cannot take any responsibility for items lost or broken in the post

EBAY: THE UK'S ONLINE MARKETPLACE





Where can I find it? Online
Web Address: www.ebay.co.uk
What can I buy there? Pretty much anything. Theoretically, you should eventually be able to find just about every game-related item ever made, providing you don't mind waiting for it, of course.

In case you've never heard of it (which is unlikely), eBay was founded in 1995 and is now the world's largest online trading community. The site works like a regular auction room – items are listed for ten days and bids can be placed at any point during that period. But first you'll need to register…

JOINING EBAY
The eBay registration process is designed to be as user-friendly as possible. All you need to do is click on the option at the top of the screen and enter your name, address and email address. You'll then have to create a user identity and password, and may also be asked to input your bank details to verify that all your information is true (this usually depends on which email service you're using). You will then be sent a confirmation email within 24 hours.

SEARCHING FOR AN ITEM
There are two simple methods of searching for items on ebay. The first is looking for groups of items (SNES games, for example) – simply click on the 'Computer & Video Gaming' link on the homepage then select your desired format from the list. Or you can type the specific title of the game or product you're looking for in the 'what are you looking for?' box and eBay will list any current items that match your search.

MAKING A BID
If you find something you'd like to buy, you can make a bid by selecting the 'bid' option on the left-hand side of the screen. You'll be asked for your user ID and password, before specifying how much you wish to bid. You can either place a bid just above the current asking price, or simply state the maximum you'd like to pay and eBay will automatically bid on your behalf until you either win the item or the price goes higher than your maximum bid.

WINNING AN AUCTION
If you win the auction, you'll need to contact the seller to arrange payment, as well as collection or delivery. The item's description will usually specify how much postage and packaging will cost, as well as which methods of payment the seller accepts. It's up to you to make sure that you reach an agreement that

ATARI 5200

TI99/4A

ATARI 400/800/600XL

INTELLIVISION

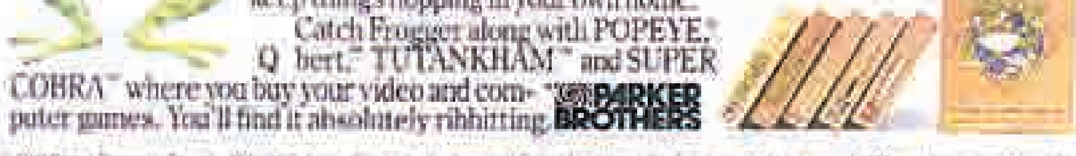
COMMODORE VIC 20

ATARI 2600

COMMODORE 64

COLECOVISION

8 WAYS YOU CAN PLAY FROGGER™ AT YOUR PAD.



FROGGER (various home systems, 1983) Eight ways to play, we'll look at one of them next month…


eMag

ESSENTIALS

TOO MANY GAMES, NOT ENOUGH MONEY. THANKFULLY THOUGH, NOT ALL OF THEM ARE WORTH SPENDING YOUR HARD-EARNED CASH ON. IF YOU WANT TO TASTE THE CREAM OF THE CROP, YOU'VE COME TO THE RIGHT PLACE…

PLAYSTATION2

DETAILS

MANUFACTURER
Sony

UK LAUNCH DATE
24 November 2000

MEDIA
4.75-inch DVD Disc

CURRENT PRICE
£169.99

The oldest of the next-generation consoles, having had well over a year's head start over both the GameCube and Xbox. With support across the board from third-party developers, a built-in DVD player and backward compatibility with older PSone games, it's the most popular videogame console available today.

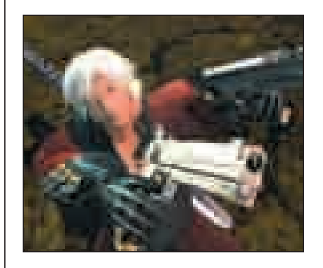




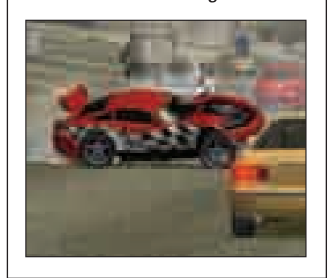
TOP TWENTY MUST-HAVE PLAYSTATION2 GAMES

No.	Title	Publisher	Developer
1	Ico	SCEE	In-House
2	Grand Theft Auto: Vice City	Rockstar Games	Rockstar North
3	TimeSplitters2	Eidos	Free Radical
4	Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 4	Activision	Neversoft
5	Pro Evolution Soccer 2	Konami	In-House
6	Burnout 2: Point Of Impact	Acclaim	Criterion
7	Dark Cloud II IMPORT	Sony	In-House
8	Devil May Cry	Capcom	In-House
9	Rez	SEGA	UGA
10	Suikoden III IMPORT	Konami	In-House
11	NBA Street 2	Electronic Arts	EA Sports BIG
12	Kingdom Hearts	SCEE	Squaresoft
13	Colin McRae Rally 3	Codemasters	In-House
14	Wild Arms 3	Ubi Soft	Media Vision
15	Ape Escape 2	Sony	In-House
16	Hitman 2: Silent Assassin	Eidos	Io Interactive
17	Project Zero	Wanadoo	Tecmo
18	Capcom VS SNK 2	Capcom	In-House
19	Virtua Fighter 4 Evolution	SEGA	AM2
20	Metal Gear Solid 2: Substance	Konami	In-House

VIEWPOINT
DEVIL MAY CRY 2
It may lack the style and grace of its predecessor, but we still can't help going back for a bit of showboating action now and again. *DMC2* is no classic but in terms of sheer blasting fun, you won't find many more action-packed titles around.



VIEWPOINT
BURNOUT 2
A fast, furious and run racer which is worth buying for the Crash Junction mode alone – the more carnage you cause, the higher your score. *Burnout 2: Point Of Impact* has been significantly tarted up for Xbox and GameCube but this version is still great fun.



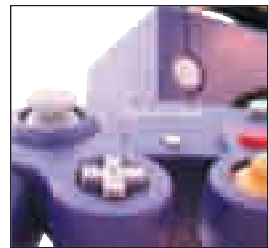
VIEWPOINT
APE ESCAPE 2
Catching monkeys – such an obvious basis for a game, it's a wonder it hasn't been done before. Wait, it has. Nevertheless, *Ape Escape 2* is one of the most enjoyable platformers on the PS2, but will Joe Public enjoy simian retrieval as much as us?



VIEWPOINT
FREQUENCY
With the ample beats of *Amplitude* belting out mere metres away, we're reminded just how damn fine its forerunner really is. Rhythm action doesn't come much better than this – it's just a shame they don't make patches to cure your addiction...













GAMECUBE

DETAILS

MANUFACTURER
Nintendo

UK LAUNCH DATE
3 May 2002

MEDIA
3-inch Optical Disc

CURRENT PRICE
£129.99

Although it's the cheapest machine on the market, Nintendo's newest console shouldn't be under-estimated. The firm's long-established experience in games means that the GameCube can expect to see many quality first- and third-party games in the future. Primarily a games machine, the GameCube has no DVD function.

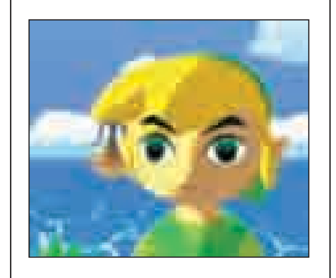


TOP TWENTY MUST-HAVE GAMECUBE GAMES

No.	Title		Publisher	Developer
1	Metroid Prime		Nintendo	In-House
2	The Legend Of Zelda: The Wind Waker		Nintendo	In-House
3	Winning Eleven 6: Final Evolution	IMPORT	Konami	In-House
4	Super Monkey Ball 2		SEGA	Amusement Vision
5	TimeSplitters2		Eidos	Free Radical
6	Burnout 2: Point Of Impact		Acclaim	In-house
7	Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 4		Activision	Neversoft
8	Ikaruga	IMPORT	Treasure	In-House
9	Super Mario Sunshine		Nintendo	In-House
10	Animal Crossing	IMPORT	Nintendo	In-House
11	Eternal Darkness		Nintendo	Silicon Knights
12	Soul Calibur II	IMPORT	Namco	In-House
13	Resident Evil		Capcom	In-House
14	Resident Evil Zero		Capcom	In-House
15	Mario Party 4		Nintendo	Hudson
16	Mr Driller: Drill Land	IMPORT	Namco	In-House
17	Skies Of Arcadia Legends	IMPORT	SEGA	Overworks
18	Star Wars: Rogue Leader		Activision	Factor 5
19	Sonic Mega Collection		SEGA	Sonic Team
20	Aggressive Inline		Acclaim	Z-Axis

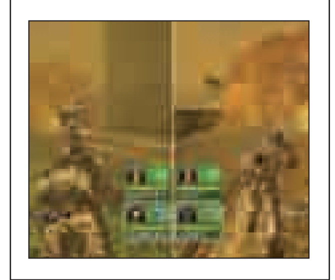
VIEWPOINT
THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: THE WIND WAKER

Having enjoyed adventures with Mario, Luigi and Samus we can now finally add an appearance by Link to the list of GameCube greats. We might have had to wait an age for it but it's Nintendo doing what it does best.



VIEWPOINT
CONFLICT: DESERT STORM

The recent activity in the Gulf has raised the profile of this game somewhat, much to the delight of SCi, no doubt. Thankfully, GameCube owners should find this stealth-based adventure very much to their liking.



VIEWPOINT
ROCKY

Rage finally looked to have a surefire hit on its hands with this brilliant boxing game. Unfortunately, Rage couldn't go the distance but this game remains a fitting tribute to a fine UK developer. Best of all, you can probably find it for twenty quid.



VIEWPOINT
SUPER MONKEY BALL 2

The original managed to keep us going for nearly a year, but now the sequel is keeping us knee-deep in monkeys all over again. More levels and more bonus games means that this is one GameCube exclusive that you can't afford to be without.



ESSENTIALS

TOO MANY GAMES, NOT ENOUGH MONEY. THANKFULLY THOUGH, NOT ALL OF THEM ARE WORTH SPENDING YOUR HARD-EARNED CASH ON. IF YOU WANT TO TASTE THE CREAM OF THE CROP, YOU'VE COME TO THE RIGHT PLACE…

XBOX

DETAILS

MANUFACTURER
Microsoft

UK LAUNCH DATE
13 March 2002

MEDIA
4.75-inch DVD Disc

CURRENT PRICE
£129.99

Despite a slow start, the Xbox is swiftly becoming one of the major players in today's console market. Suggestions that the machine is only 'a PC in a box' are founded upon the built-in hard drive, broadband support and DVD player. However, the Xbox is far more accessible to the casual gamer than most PCs.



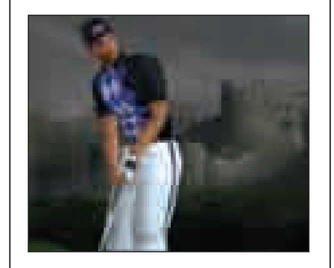


TOP TWENTY MUST-HAVE XBOX GAMES

No.	Title	Publisher	Developer
1	Halo	Microsoft	Bungie
2	Panzer Dragoon Orta	SEGA	Smilebit
3	Jet Set Radio Future	SEGA	Smilebit
4	TimeSplitters2	Eidos	Free Radical
5	Splinter Cell	Ubi Soft	In-House
6	Project Gotham Racing	Microsoft	Bizarre Creations
7	Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 4	Activision	Neversoft
8	Project Zero	Microsoft	Tecmo
9	Burnout 2: Point Of Impact	Acclaim	Criterion Studios
10	Aggressive Inline	Acclaim	Z-Axis
11	Ghost Recon	Ubi Soft	Red Storm
12	Dead Or Alive 3	Microsoft	Tecmo
13	Soul Calibur II IMPORT	Namco	In-House
14	Moto GP	THQ	Climax
15	Hitman 2: Silent Assassin	Eidos	Io Interactive
16	Quantum Redshift	Microsoft	Curly Monsters
17	Colin McRae Rally 3	CodeMasters	In-House
18	Tiger Woods 2003	EA	In-House
19	Buffy The Vampire Slayer	EA	In-House
20	Unreal Championship	Infogrames	Epic Games

VIEWPOINT
TIGER WOODS 2003

Updates of sports games have a tendency to be disappointing but *Tiger Woods 2003* is different. Lost in the Christmas deluge, this is one sports title that offers gamers more than enough gaming pleasure to ensure its place in our collection.



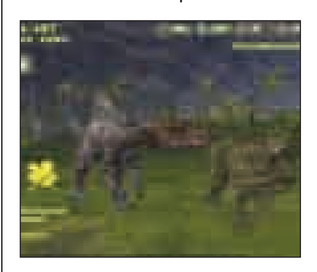
VIEWPOINT
MOTO GP

Largely overlooked upon release, now is definitely the right time to get in the saddle with this impressive racer. If the superlative gameplay isn't reason enough to warrant your interest, the budget price of £19.99 should certainly get your engines revving.



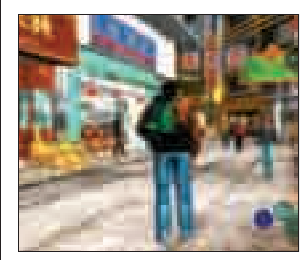
VIEWPOINT
JURASSIC PARK: OPERATION GENESIS

Playing god with dinosaurs is as fun as it sounds. Simply take your drugged Spinosaurus, add him to a packed cafeteria and wait for him to wake up. The end result is one mad dino and plenty of dead visitors. Superb stuff.



VIEWPOINT
SHENMUE II

Since finding a home on the Xbox, *Shenmue* doesn't quite seem like the revolutionary game series that it did on the Dreamcast. That said, Ryu's quest still manages to engage. It might not have reversed the Dreamcast's fortunes but it's still a damn fine game.










GBA

DETAILS

MANUFACTURER
Nintendo

UK LAUNCH DATE
22 June 2001

MEDIA
Flash Cartridge

CURRENT PRICE
£69.99



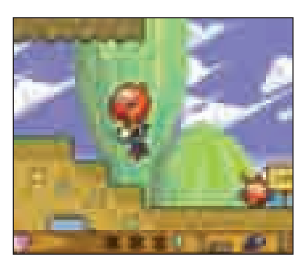
Ideal for gaming on the move, the GBA is a cheap and effective way of getting games to those who don't have time to sit down and play. The leaps in handheld technology mean that GBA games are now more accomplished and can even be compared favourably to their console-based cousins. The lovely new SP model is available now.

TOP TEN MUST-HAVE GAME BOY ADVANCE GAMES

No.	Title	Publisher	Developer
1	Advance Wars	Nintendo	In-House
2	Zelda: A Link To The Past/Four Swords	Nintendo	In-House
3	Super Mario Advance 3: Yoshi's Island	Nintendo	In-House
4	Golden Sun	Nintendo	Camelot
5	Metroid Fusion	Nintendo	In-House
6	Street Fighter Alpha 3	Ubi Soft	Crawfish
7	Castlevania: Harmony Of Dissonance	Konami	In-House
8	Pokémon Ruby & Sapphire IMPORT	Nintendo	In-House
9	Sonic Advance 2	SEGA	Sonic Team
10	Speedball 2: Brutal Deluxe	Wanadoo	Crawfish

VIEWPOINT
KLONOA

With a look and feel similar to a Nintendo in-house product, Namco's *Klonoa* features some of the most creative puzzles you'll find in a platformer.



VIEWPOINT
CASTLEVANIA: HARMONY OF DISSONANCE

Two castles, plenty of creepy bosses and a little magic ensure that the second *Castlevania* title is well worth picking up.



PC

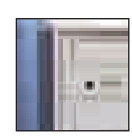
DETAILS

MANUFACTURER
N/A

UK LAUNCH DATE
N/A

MEDIA
4.75-inch CD/DVD Disc

CURRENT PRICE
£variable



While primarily bought as a work platform, the PC has swiftly become the haven of the more 'mature' gamer. With its natural ability for online and LAN play, it is perfectly tailored for the FPS, strategy and MMORPG genres. However, it can cost a fortune to keep a PC up to date and running fast enough to support flashy graphics.

TOP TEN MUST-HAVE PC GAMES

No.	Title	Publisher	Developer
1	Grand Theft Auto: Vice City	Rockstar Games	Rockstar North
2	Unreal Tournament 2003	Infogrames	Digital Extremes
3	Championship Manager 4	Eidos	Sports Interactive
4	Operation: Flashpoint	Codemasters	In-House
5	Freelancer	Microsoft	Digital Anvil
6	Half-Life	Vivendi	Valve Software
7	The Sims	EA	Maxis
8	Age Of Mythology	Microsoft	Ensemble Studios
9	Fallout 2	Virgin Interactive	Interplay
10	Sam And Max Hit The Road	Activision	LucasArts

VIEWPOINT
TROPICO 2

Live the debauched life of a pirate king in the sequel to the award-winning strategy game. With the emphasis on fun and humour, this is a must for all RTS fans.



VIEWPOINT
STRIKE FIGHTERS: PROJECT 1

Jet fighters in the Sixties were great - and bloody dangerous too. If you fancy flying one, you could do worse than this absorbing sim.



PERIPHERALS

THEY MAY NOT BE EVERYONE'S CUP OF TEA, BUT EACH CONSOLE HAS ITS OWN MUST-HAVE PERIPHERALS – THOSE LITTLE EXTRAS THAT MAKE THE GAMING EXPERIENCE ALL THE MORE PLEASURABLE. CAN YOU KEEP YOUR HANDS OFF THEM?

DVD CONTROLLER

DETAILS

CONSOLE
PlayStation2

FROM
JOYTECH

CURRENT PRICE
£9.99

AVAILABLE
Out now

A DVD remote is a man's best friend (if he likes watching DVDs, of course) but getting an official one for the PS2 is a pretty expensive affair. Up to £25 for a controller with more buttons on it than you actually need? No thanks. While we're normally the first to say how great official controllers are, something that's just a handy add-on rather than a necessity shouldn't be that pricey. That's why JOYTECH's latest offering comes as a pleasant surprise. Not only does it come with a vertical stand on which to put your PS2 as well as matching the ergonomics of the lovely Xbox DVD remote, but it's only £10. Yes, £10 – the same price as the official PS2 vertical stand on its own. Is that a bargain? Certainly. And what's more, it works really well too and won't get lost down the back of the sofa. Nice.



METAL DANCE PLATFORM



DETAILS

CONSOLE
PlayStation2

FROM
Logic 3

CURRENT PRICE
£125

AVAILABLE
Out now

No, it's not a misprint – Logic 3's latest foray into the realm of dance mat technology really does cost £125. Blimey. That said, it's a small price to pay for what is effectively a piece of an arcade machine in your own home. Measuring nearly a metre square and weighing a whopping 16.5 kilograms, it take a hefty amount of punishment (up to 20 stone, according to Logic 3) and even lights up as you hit each marker. The only catch is that it's not as forgiving as plastic dance mats, meaning you'll have to be more skilful at playing the games – but then, that's how it is in the arcade too. If you're a dancing nut, this is a must-have – £250 gets you your very own two-player dance arcade machine. No more gawping strangers? Can't say fairer than that.



GP32

DETAILS

CONSOLE
N/A

FROM
GamePark

CURRENT PRICE
From £117.99

AVAILABLE
Out now

Okay, so it might not exactly be a peripheral but having had the chance to give the GP32 a thorough test this month, we thought it was too important a machine for us not to point it out to you. On the face of it, it looks like just another handheld games console, get underneath though, and you'll soon see the difference. Although it boasts a large 3.5-inch screen, a 32-bit processor and 16-bit stereo sound, the interesting thing is that it runs from SmartMedia cards (the kind most digital cameras use) and uses open source code.

Basically, this means that anyone with even the slightest knowledge of coding can program for it. It also means that, with a bit of PC knowledge and the handy USB cable that comes with it, you can upload practically any useable file (sound, video and more) to the handheld and then run it. And yes, that includes tons of specially constructed emulators for the GP32 – from Commodore 64 and Master System titles to SNES and even arcade games as well as older PC titles like *Doom* and *Monkey Island*. While we obviously can't condone the emulated use of any game system (because it's illegal, don't you know), it's kinda cool just the same. Plus the thought of being able to play *Sam And Max* on the move is worth the money alone.

Being slightly more technical than your usual handheld, it's obviously not the kind of thing that's going to appeal to everyone. For us though, we don't see how we managed to get through all those long, lonesome PR trips without a GP32 (especially when the batteries in our trusty Game Boys died on us). With additional extras such as a backlight, wireless gaming module and even a carry case also available, now is definitely the time to pick one of these up. If it tickles your fancy, hop on over to www.gamepark32.co.uk and have your credit card details at the ready…

"WITH ADDITIONAL EXTRAS SUCH AS A BACKLIGHT, WIRELESS GAMING MODULE AND EVEN A CARRY CASE ALSO AVAILABLE, NOW IS DEFINITELY THE TIME TO PICK ONE OF THESE UP"


eMag

Twin karts, souped-up graphics and even GameCube-to-GameCube link-up play – will Miyamoto-san's much anticipated racer be the best one yet?

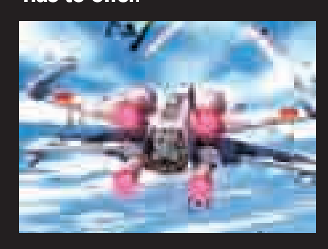
MARIO KART DOUBLE DASH

NEXT MONTH IN gamesTM

Well, it's about time – the Electronic Entertainment Expo (or E3, if you're lazy) has been and gone. Why is that good news? Because it means we've now got more great games to show you than ever before…

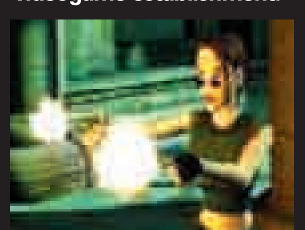
MORE… PREVIEWS

Those games at E3 don't just play themselves, you know – that's why we had the very best people out there, getting all the information you could ever need about the very best each format has to offer.



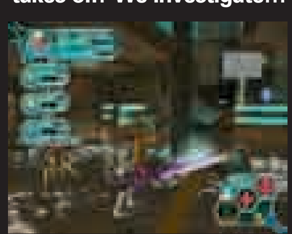
MORE… REVIEWS

On top of seeing what's coming, there'll be plenty of coverage of what's already here. As ever, we'll be looking at what's hot and what most certainly is not in your local videogame establishment.



MORE… FEATURES

Ah, online gaming – the future of console-based games, if you believe the hype. But with people already cheating like crazy, could the hackers destroy the next big thing before it takes off? We investigate…



Yes, we're tired of 11-hour flights, badly ventilated conference halls and sweaty Americans, but that's not going to stop us from bringing you all the information you want, right here next month. We share because we care – really, we do.


180
PAGES OF
BANANA-SKIDDING
GREATNESS
ON SALE 19 JUNE 03

CONTACT

ILLUMINATING THE WORLD OF gamesTM

FINALLY, YOU SEEM TO HAVE STOPPED FRETTING ABOUT NINTENDO. BUT NOW YOU'RE JUST GETTING BEES IN YOUR BONNETS ABOUT OTHER GAMING ISSUES…

Sloppy ports, videogames losing their way and lack of depth in our reviews – plenty of things have been getting your proverbial goat this month. You lot really need to stop worrying, you know. Worrying gives you wrinkles. It's true.



MAKING CONTACT

☐ **There are many wonderful ways to get in touch with games™. The traditional postal method is perfectly acceptable using the address below:**

games™
Paragon Publishing Ltd
Paragon House
St Peter's Road
Bournemouth
BH1 2JS

☐ However, there are quicker ways to reach us thanks to the technological marvel that is the Internet. Email us at this address:
gamestm@paragon.co.uk

☐ Alternatively, why not get yourself on our dedicated forum? Here you should be shielded from multiple spams and infantile remarks. Access to the site has been password protected and only those of you who have bought this issue of **games™** will be able to get onto the site – and if you have bought this magazine then you're not the sort to be abusive and childish, are you? Follow these quick steps to getting on the **games™** forum and enjoy hassle-free chatting with those of us who share a passion for gaming.

☐ **Step One:**
Get yourself online. It's fairly simple, so we're sure you'll think of something.

☐ **Step Two:**
Type the following into the Net browser window:
www.totalgames.net/forum/
This will give you read-only access to the forum. To get in on the fun, you'll have to register – you can do that by clicking on the 'Register' icon at the top of the page. Fill in your details, choose a name and then wait for a password to be emailed to you (which will arrive in no time).

☐ **Step Three:**
Once registered, click on the **games™** forum icon. You'll need the password, and that's '**winner**'. Then a whole world of sophisticated wit and games chat will be yours. It says here.

☐ **IT'S GREAT THAT** there is finally a gaming magazine out there with a mature outlook on the most invigorating pastime known to mankind. But to get to the point, you're smart, different and stand out from the crowd, sure, but are you different enough?

If there is one thing I would like to see in the magazine, it is more information in reviews to let us serious gamers know what we're buying. I am referring in part to your review of *Street Fighter Alpha 3* on the Game Boy Advance. I just bought it to practise *Street Fighter* on the move, for when I play my regular opponent. Now, you only mentioned a little about the control system, but not about how it works or the shortcomings. I've got used to it, in part, but I am disgusted with it on the whole. Let me elaborate…

Six attacks. Four buttons. Now, *SSF2 Turbo Revival* used a press-duration system to differentiate between attacks, but instead, *SFA3* uses a system of combination buttons, which sounds good on paper but doesn't really work too well. It's hard enough pulling off basic moves, but when it comes to using some of the game's finer features, such as throws and escapes, or even moves such as Zangief's Spinning Lariat, we have a problem. As all the buttons are already allocated to regular punches and kicks, how can this special move be performed? It can't. Change your controls.

This may seem like a minor, if irrelevant gripe, but that fact is that no publication around today will inform the gamer of something with as much game-ruining potential as this. So I suggest that providing gamers with more in-depth information may actually cement your reputation as the serious gameplayer's magazine, and distance yourself from an immature, underdeveloped crowd. How about it?
Jay Townsend

games™: Fair enough, but we'd be hard pressed to go into detail in such a way for every game. Where possible, we do try to highlight games' inadequacies, but space, and sometimes limitations of the hardware, come into play when we review games. To some extent, we'd expect there to be some button configuration problems on any GBA version of *Street Fighter* but that doesn't detract from the fact that it's an impressive handheld series.

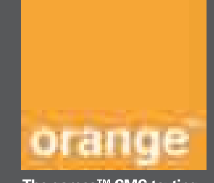
☐ **ONE WORD: PORTS.** Quite frankly, I'm sick of them, and I'm sure that I am not the only one. Although, to be more precise, it's the sloppy and direct ports that really grate on me. Console games often come out on the PlayStation2 first, which is understandable considering the huge installed user-base, but what frustrates me is how development houses and, more specifically, publishers think they can get away with churning out almost exactly the same game on obviously more powerful machines such as the Xbox

"WILL WE SEE GROUNDBREAKING GAMES AGAIN OR DROWN IN A PILE OF FIFA, TONY HAWK AND RUBBISH FILM TIE-INS?"

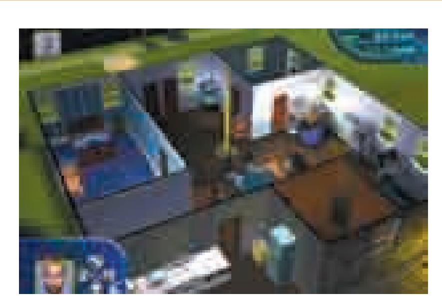
SMS TEXT

■ We've got an exclusive SMS text service sponsored by Orange.
Simply text us your question or comment on

07970 043498



The games™ SMS texting service is brought to you courtesy of Orange. For more information on Orange's range of wirefree™ games log on to: www.orange.co.uk/multimedia



Has *The Sims* become a tired idea? Or are the regular updates keeping an original concept fresh?

and GameCube up to six months after the original release.

I don't particularly want to mention any of the guilty parties, but EA sticks out like a sore thumb. The number of straight conversions EA makes is an obvious cash-in exercise, and while you can't blame EA for putting its games onto multiple formats, it would surely make sense to optimise each conversion for the specific format. This would improve the experience for the gamer, and could help increase sales of a particular title.
Chris Walker

games™: You're right, some publishers and developers don't take advantage of the hardware. Whether this is due to financial constraints or because some developers simply haven't got to grips with individual hardware remains unclear. Times are changing though. Look at *Burnout 2*; a prime example of a developer doing the job properly by giving the Xbox and GameCube impressive ports of a PS2 game. And now that there are enough GameCube and Xbox owners out there, developers can safely plough cash into version-specific copies of games, safe in the knowledge that they'll get their money back.

☐ **IN A FIELD** that is new, everything is an innovation. If something isn't invented then it will be. The industry has been going long enough, so surely it must have innovated itself dry? Think again…

There are certain companies that might as well be called #2 and #3 as they just copy old ideas. I'm not going to name and shame companies as the list would be far too long, but what is innovation and what isn't? If we think about it, most ideas have been copied and so all games copy something.

Unfortunately, there are few games that can be considered truly innovative. Games like *Animal Crossing* and *Rez* are prime examples; the ideas have been done before, but the way in which the companies have treated the subject matter is what makes them special, but are they appreciated by the gaming masses?

With the age of the casual gamer, games like *Micro Machines* and *The Sims* are only too prominent, and it isn't nice. Sure, the ideas were good with the first game, but there is such a thing as doing it for the money. Games that lack anything shouldn't even be given a chance of surviving, but they live on, so that means somebody is buying the damn things!

We shouldn't accept such tripe. There are companies out there that can innovate and make decent gaming experiences. Gamers don't care, and the companies are catching on. Why put tons of effort into a game when you know that putting Mickey Mouse on the front will make it sell? The situation isn't going to change – just like the music industry has duff artists, the games industry has poor games.
James Temperton

games™: Whoa, James – some sweeping statements there. The problem remains that individual gamers' needs will always differ. But as you clearly have the savvy to pick and choose games according to your exacting standards, and as long as some developers continue to provide you with the kinds of games you like, then does it matter what 'casual' gamers get up to?

CONTACT
ILLUMINATING THE WORLD OF gamesTM

TEXT LIFE...

☐ Put UNREAL CHAMPIONSHIP in your xbox essentials. Its much better then at least five games in there. Max payne ain't that bad either.
We don't do requests. But we have overhauled the Essentials section slightly, so see if you prefer it this month…

☐ PEFECT DARK ZERO SHOULD INCLUDE AN EXACT COPY OF THE OLD GOLDENEYE MULITPLAYER. A DREAM COME TRUE ANYONE?
We assume that you mean the levels, no? That would be very nice but many of you have recreated a good many of them in the rather splendid *TimeSplitters 2*.

☐ Are we ever likely to see Panzer Dragoon or jet set radio future on the gamecube? Save me buying another console!
We'd like to say yes, but it's very unlikely.

☐ Does anyone there remember the oric 1 or the texas instruments ti-99-4a?
Hmm, yes – we do have vague memories of those machines…

☐ Are there any television programmes about games consoles/computer games worth watching. If so when and what channel?
***Gamepad* on Bravo is a decent attempt, but videogaming is badly under-represented on TV at the moment**

☐ I hear they are updating outrun but r they maybe going 2 do space harrier chase h.q. etc keep up the good work
SEGA is developing a new *Out Run*, and *Space Harrier* had a sequel, *Planet Harriers*, that appeared in arcades. Unfortunately, rumours that this would make it onto a console have proved unfounded. Perhaps E3 might see this and *Chase H.Q.* make new appearances.

☐ Was reading issue 2 of games and just thought id let u know that i had a kempston joystick interface for my spectrum 128. Which allowed me to later use my m.system and m.drive controllers, genius! Top magazine geezers!
Please, enough of the Kempston saga…

☐ Will dead or alive beach volleyball b released on any other format apart from the xbox?
Not a chance. Tecmo is remaining faithful to the Xbox, so you'll have to hand over your cash to Mr Gates if you want to play with the lovely volleyball ladies. Mmm, ladies.

"HAS THE INCREASING FOCUS ON PANDERING TO THE RECREATIONAL 'PICK-UP-AND-PLAY' GAMER FINALLY AFFECTED ONE OF THE LAST BASTIONS OF TRUE GAMING?"

☐ **WITH THE RECENT** confirmation by Nintendo of America's senior vice president of marketing, George Harrison, that 'Shigeru Miyamoto agreed with criticism that the game [*Super Mario Sunshine*] was too hard… The word has since come from up high to make games less challenging'. What does this mean for faithful Nintendo fans?

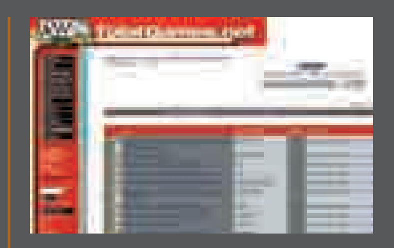
Has the increasing focus on pandering to the recreational 'pick-up-and-play' gamer finally affected one of the last bastions of true gaming? This isn't an elitist rant, but do you not believe that with the dumbing down of Nintendo first- and second-party titles future gaming generations will be missing out on some truly spectacular games as Nintendo tries to win over the Sony generation, and that Nintendo stalwarts will have to turn to the retro market for their gaming fix, technically removing the only 'sure thing' that Nintendo has in terms of customer base?
Mark Heery

gamesTM: It's doubtful that Nintendo will go down that route. Certainly, it's in its best interests to make games that appeal to as many gamers as possible, and that might mean that some games become easier. But when you think about it, *Super Mario World* was a game that could be 'completed' relatively quickly. The longevity came from discovering the many secrets contained within the game. This is probably what Nintendo was referring to. *Super Mario Sunshine* was too hard for some people and became a chore; *Metroid Prime* is hard in a pedantic way – you can only complete it by finding and scanning everything, which some gamers find a little harsh. We think that Nintendo is right as some consideration needs to be given to the difficulty level of games to ensure that players of any level can get the best from their games.

☐ **THE WAY I** see it, games are going to have to cross a big hurdle a few years from now. When PC and console technology has the capabilities to consistently produce photo-realistic graphics, there won't be anything to separate games other than concept, gameplay and the like.

But all games are ultimately restrictive; there is nothing you can do that hasn't been programmed into the game. Why can't I blast a hole in that wall? Or climb that fence? The same applies to so-called Artificial Intelligence. Many games have pre-programmed responses that give the impression of a thinking entity but, in reality, they have a limited response to the various actions the gamer can perform. All in-game possibilities that are available to us are limited by the developers, so it would follow the AI is just as restricted.

So what will a game of the future consist of? A game that lets you take any path that you want in the setting created by the developers looks to be the direction we are heading in. The games that get me most excited are those that promise this, like *Deus Ex 2*, *Republic* and (to a certain extent) *Black & White 2*. As for AI, more research has to be done in this area. I can say, quite categorically, that there are no games that could fool you into thinking that you are playing another person. Maybe AI characters will be more believable when they look like real people, and you start to think twice before capping that ped' just cos' he's walking.
Peter Hopkins



FROM THE FORUM

Are we enjoying a golden age in gaming?

☐ **colddogsoup**
posted 21 April 2003 02:14 AM
Is it me or are we enjoying a golden age in gaming? Perhaps it's because I have more than one console, but there are some great games out there. *Orta*, a new *Zelda*, still playing *Pro Evo* with me mates. Even *DOAXBV* is a damn fine game. I'm an old gamer, and it really annoys me when my generation slag off these new games. If this is a bad time to play games, I can't wait for the good.

☐ **Numpty**
posted 21 April 2003 02:53 AM
I'm with you, but it's a fairly small club around these parts.
For me, the best of today's games are the best there has ever been. There seems to be a trend toward saying that the incredible graphics of some of the modern games are gained at the expense of great gameplay, which, if you look at *Metroid Prime*, is patently b*llocks.

☐ **[state]**
posted 21 April 2003 10:03 AM
You could say that we're in a new golden age of gaming. Or you could say: no, we're not. *Zelda*: by all accounts it's cel-shaded *Ocarina*. Nintendo has pulled a *Sunshine* by updating the graphics and keeping the game mechanics pretty much identical. This is from second-hand accounts, I've yet to experience it myself. *Orta*: On rails shooting, no matter how pretty, does not a new gameplay experience make. At least *Rez* tried something new with the genre. Yes, there are good games out there, but they're retreads of old titles. Such is life in gaming these days. If you want something truly original, you'll be hard pressed to find it in major studio releases – gaming is moving more towards the film industry in that respect.

☐ **Beam**
posted 21 April 2003 02:13 PM
I wouldn't have said it was a golden age until I played *Metriod Prime* – that game is amazing! I thought that kind of classic gaming experience had been lost forever.

☐ **$hitigottaheadrush**
posted 21 April 2003 02:45 PM
We are in a golden age. While there are things spoiling it (the Xbox, casual gamers making developers lazy and afraid of new ideas), we do have an amazing array of quality games that we're enjoying far more then we did before (I may be speaking for myself). But I will not feel totally happy until *Shadowman* and *Turok 1, 2, 3* and *Rage Wars* are ported over to the GameCube.

☐ **Beam**
posted 22 April 2003 12:12 PM
I think the things that are ruining it are the fact that we've got too many 'casual' gamers who are perfectly happy playing sub-standard games so long as they've got great graphics. Because of that, lazy developers never bother to work on the gameplay because if it looks good it will sell. A few weeks ago I said that good graphics are absolutely useless and it's the gameplay that makes all the difference. *Metroid Prime* proved me wrong because that's a game where the graphics really add to the game and make playing it quite an incredible experience. Up until *Prime*, good graphics have never been used correctly. Take football games, for example – the gameplay is essentially *Sensible Soccer* but every year it's updated with great graphics and it sells really well. So if you pick your games carefully, it's great, but surely the definition of a 'golden age' is when nearly all the games are great. I'd say the true 'golden age' was in the early Nineties with the SNES and the Mega Drive.



With games like *Deus Ex 2* in the offing, how soon before we see true in-game freedom?

games™: Patience, grasshopper – you want so much and in so little time. We're sure that the kinds of games that you speak of will appear, just not in the very near future. At the moment, hardware limitations prevail, and there's a lot to be said for games that aren't that realistic…

☐ **I AM WORRIED**. When is there going to be a new game worth getting excited about? As I glance at the list of forthcoming titles I sense nothing but dread and disappointment. Having recently looked forward to *Metroid Prime* and *The Getaway* and then been let down I fear that my love for games may be dwindling.

Can there be hope on the horizon? Will *Zelda* live up to my expectations (I'm sorry, but I can't trust the opinion of some fanatic who imports it or plays it in Japanese)? Will online console gaming get off the ground in the UK? I would love to go head to head against human opponents on *SOCOM* for example but it promises to be so expensive.

I want to fall in love with games all over again, like I did when I played *Goldeneye, Ocarina Of Time* or *Metal Gear Solid*. Will we see groundbreaking games again or drown in a pile of *FIFA*, *Tony Hawk* and rubbish film tie-ins? I need some hope and reassurance. Please tell me all is not lost.
Mark Palmer

games™: *Soul Calibur II, Perfect Dark Zero, F-Zero, Mario Kart: Double Dash, Freedom: Soldiers Of Liberty* – any of those interest you? And there are more besides… plenty more, in fact. There is dross out there, but there always has been. There were over a thousand games for the PSone and not all of them were shining examples of gaming loveliness. Don't be down-hearted by crap games, there'll soon be something to rekindle that special feeling between man and machine.

☐ **MICROSOFT MAKE DUFF** PCs. They leave any unfixed bugs in so thay can meet the release date, and then when people complain they release patches over the Net. Windows XP alone had 212 amendments made to it a mere month after the release. They do this with their PC games too. Admittedly, it's not as severe but no-one wants to spend time that could be used enjoying the games downloading what should have been there in the first place.

So now that the Xbox is going online, will Microsoft be tempted to do the same there? Or are they cautious about knocking themselves out of the running? Or if they do go ahead, will other consoles follow suit to keep up? Microsoft could get games out faster, giving it an edge over the PS2 and Gamecube. Given the increasely hit-driven nature of the market it seems plausible. Are my worries unfounded?
Jack Burton

games™: We wouldn't say unfounded – more misplaced. Obviously, no-one wants developers rushing out games for the Xbox (don't forget, Microsoft isn't responsible for all of them) with the intention of releasing a patch a bit further down the line when their mistakes come to light; the last thing you want is an unfinished game. On the plus side though, it's likely you won't even notice the patch is there – the downloads are meant to be automatic, meaning you won't have to do anything but enjoy the improved performance…

CONTINUE



